

SERMONS,

AND

PLANS OF SERMONS,

ON MANY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TEXTS OF

HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY THE LATE REV. JOSEPH BENSON.

Τὴν διακονίαν σου πληροφορήσον.—2 Tim. iv. 5.

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SERMONS,

AND

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CI.

CHRIST TO BE RECEIVED IN ALL HIS OFFICES AND CHARACTERS.

JOHN I. 11, 12.

*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
But as many as received him, to them gave he power
to become the sons of God, even to them that believe
on his name.*

It is unnecessary to say of whom the Evangelist is speaking in these words. You know that he speaks of him whom he terms "the Word" that was in the beginning of all things "with God, and was God;" the Word that spoke into being all that is, and gave the universe, and every creature in it, its proper form, and state, and powers; "by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made;" which Word he terms the true light "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world;" the light of reason and nature, as well as of revelation and grace, being from him. This Word, when made flesh and dwelling among us, bears the name of "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Now

we here learn that although "he was in the world" from the beginning, manifesting himself to the Patriarchs and Prophets, "and the world was made by him" yet "the world knew him not." "He came to his own," &c.—
 Consider,

I. IN WHAT SENSE HE CAME TO HIS OWN, AND HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT.

He came as the true, the often predicted, and long expected, *Messiah*; (Hag. ii. 7; John iv. 26;) answering all the characters given of the Messiah in the Old Testament. Was the Messiah to be the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, to be born of a virgin, and at Bethlehem? Such was Jesus. Was it foretold of the Messiah, that he should "grow up as a tender plant," &c. (Isai. liii. 2;)—that in his teaching he should not "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;" (Isai. xlii. 2—4;)—that he should work miracles; (Isai. xxxv. 5, 6;)—should live without violence or deceit; (Isai. liii. 9;)—should endure suffering; (Isai. l. 5, 6; liii. 3; Psal. xxii. 14;)—should be cut off out of the land of the living;" (Isai. liii. 8; Dan. ix. 26;)—should be "taken from the prison" of the grave, and "exalted and extolled," in consequence of his resurrection and ascension? (Isai. liii. 10; lii. 13.) Our Jesus fulfilled all these prophecies. He came to his own, (*εἰς τὰ ἰδία*), to *his own things*, his own land, termed *Immanuel's land*; his own city, called *the Holy City*; his own temple. (Mal. iii. 1.) Yet "his own," (*οἱ ἰδιοί*), *his own people*, even those whom he had separated from all the people upon earth, watched over, protected, delivered,

and singularly favoured, in a variety of ways, and in a most extraordinary manner, for many ages, “received him not,” in the character of the Messiah, because he did not countenance and gratify their carnal spirit and views, by coming in that state of worldly and external wealth, power, and grandeur, in which they expected him to come.

He came as *Immanuel*, God with us, as it was foretold he should. (Isai. vii. 14; ix. 6; xxxv. 4; xl. 9, 10.) Hence he testified that he was the “living bread which came down from heaven;” (John vi. 51;) that he existed before Abraham, (John viii. 58,) and was the Son of God. (John x. 30.) And he confirmed his testimony by exercising the authority, and displaying the majesty of God,—by forgiving sins; (Matt. ix. 2;) by healing the sick;—“*I will, be thou clean;*” (Matt. viii. 3;) by raising the dead;—“*Damsel, I say unto thee, arise!*” (Mark v. 41;) “*Lazarus, come forth!*” (John xi. 43;) by calming the troubled waves and winds,—“*Peace, be still.*” (Mark iv. 39.) But so far were they from receiving him as such, that they would not even acknowledge him to be a true messenger of God, but accounted him a “sinner,” (John ix. 24,) a “deceiver,” (Matt. xxvii. 63,) “mad,” and possessed of the “Devil.” (John x. 20.)

He came as the *Prophet like unto Moses*, according to a prediction delivered concerning him, (Deut. xviii. 15,) and he resembled him in many things. Jesus, like Moses, when an infant, was saved from the cruelty of a bloody tyrant who had doomed him, with a multitude of other children, to die. Jesus is the Lawgiver of Christians, as Moses had been of the Jews. Jesus, like Moses, was remarkable for the meekness of his

disposition. Like Moses, he is a mediating Prophet, "standing in the gap to turn away the wrath" of heaven from a guilty people. He is the shepherd of the Lord, to lead his straying sheep to the promised land, as Moses led the Israelites within view of Canaan. He fasted forty days and nights in the wilderness, as did Moses on Mount Sinai. He was lifted up upon the cross to heal believers, as Moses lifted up the brazen serpent. He hath wounded, and will wound, "Kings in the day of his wrath," (Psal. cx. 5,) as Moses smote Pharaoh, Sihon, Og, and other princes. He despised the "kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them," as Moses despised the treasures of Egypt. He is the great Prophet of the New Testament, as Moses was of the Old. But, notwithstanding these points of evident resemblance, and notwithstanding that he gave, by more numerous and mightier miracles, a more holy life, more accumulated sufferings, and a glorious resurrection from the dead, still greater demonstration of his Divine mission, and of the truth and importance of his doctrine in general, and of his predictions in particular; yet they neither believed nor received him, because his doctrine contradicted their prejudices, censured their vices, and laid a restraint upon their dominant lusts.

He came as *the High Priest of their profession*, and a *Mediator* between God and man, typified by Aaron and his sons, and he came to offer sacrifice, to intercede and bless, as they did; to offer himself as a sacrifice, to "bear the sins of many," to "make his soul an offering for sin," (Isai. liii. 10, 11,) to "intercede for transgressors," (ver. 12,) to "bless us, in turning every one of us from our iniquities;" (Acts iii. 26;) but they,

depending on being Abraham's seed, on the ceremony of circumcision, on the Aaronial priesthood, and the expiations of their law, and, in general, on their own righteousness for justification, "received him not" in these characters.

He came as a Redeemer and Saviour, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, (lix. 20; xlii. 6, 7,) to "give his life a ransom for many," to "die for the ungodly," to "die for all when all were dead." But not feeling, nor even seeing their want of the redemption and salvation which are through him, confident they "were never in bondage," (ch. viii. 33,) and having no desire nor relish for any such spiritual blessings as he had to bestow, they "received him not" in any such relations.

He came as the King of Israel, and his Holy One; to be "set upon God's holy hill of Zion;" (Psal. ii. 6;) the "righteous Branch raised unto David," the "King that was to reign and prosper, and to execute judgment and justice in the earth." (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6;) Zion's King that was to come to her; "just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass;" (Zech. ix. 9;) the King that was to rescue them from their enemies, to protect and govern them by holy, just, and good laws, and to reward or punish their disobedience. But as his kingdom was "not of this world," not earthly but heavenly, not carnal but spiritual, and as he had it not in his commission to confer what they only coveted, temporal wealth, honour, dignities, titles, and as they did not desire a kingdom of another world, they would not receive him; nay, they rejected him. For when Pilate said, "Behold your King!" they exclaimed, "We have no King but Cæsar:" "not this man, but Barabbas:" "away with him, away with him," "we will not

have this man to reign over us." (John xix. 14, 15; xviii. 40; Luke xix. 14.)

II. IN WHAT SENSE IT IS NECESSARY WE SHOULD RECEIVE HIM, AND WHETHER WE DO SO RECEIVE HIM.

It will be said perhaps, "What is all this to us? what have we to do with the Jews not receiving Christ? Surely we receive him, as the very name of Christian, by which we are called, makes it evident." I answer: It is true we receive his name, and, therefore, receive him by profession; we receive, also, the Scriptures as declaring his will; and, perhaps, his ordinances, which we, from time to time attend. But do we receive him in all the offices and characters which he sustains? and do we know on what grounds he should be so received? We acknowledge him to be the true Messiah; but have we considered on what foundation we confess this, and the proper import of the term? Have we considered that it implies he is the anointed, *i. e.* the divinely commissioned and qualified Teacher, Mediator, Redeemer, Saviour, Governor, and Judge of mankind, and especially of believers?

Observe then,

Acknowledging him as an infallible Teacher come from God, have we viewed him as teaching truths of infinite moment, and absolute certainty? Have we applied to him for instruction in those truths with minds divested of prejudice, of all preconceived opinions, adopted from others and without due consideration? and are we perfectly willing and desirous to know "the truth as it is in him," that it may "make us free?" As we cannot discern and relish it, while blinded by

sin, unbelief, the love of the world, an earthly, sensual, and devilish disposition, do we strive against, and relinquish these things? Do we read, hear, meditate, and above all, pray for the spirit of wisdom and illumination? Do we comply with the truth, as far as we know it, being persuaded the end of knowledge is practice?

Acknowledging that he is a prevalent Mediator to effect our reconciliation with God, do we really receive him in that character? That is; Do we know, and are we sensible of our natural enmity to God, and his wrath against us, and of our need of this reconciliation? Are we humbled in our spirit, and filled with godly sorrow on this account? and do we hate and resist the inward enmity, as well as abandon the wicked works whereby it is manifested? (Col. i. 21.) Do we see the insufficiency of our own works, or righteousness, to expiate our sins, or remove our guilt, and the condemnation and wrath due to us, and renounce all dependence upon them? Do we rely, for this purpose, only on the sacrifice and intercession of the Messiah? Thus coming to him, and confiding in him, do we find him precious? Is the enmity, the carnal mind, in part at least, removed, and the love of God and of Christ shed abroad in our hearts?—

Confessing him to be an all-sufficient Redeemer and Saviour; are we sensible of our state of bondage and captivity to Satan, sin, and death; of our depravity, weakness, and wretchedness; that we cannot redeem and save ourselves, but stand in need of redemption and salvation from him? Persuaded that he hath redeemed us by price, hath bought us, and that we are not our own, do we give ourselves to him, desiring to “glorify him in our body and spirit, which are his?” Know-

ing that he is able and willing to redeem us by his power, do we apply to him, rely on him, and not rest without redemption and salvation from the power of iniquity; without the “law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, making us free from the law of sin and death?” (Rom. viii. 2.) And have we actually received this redemption and salvation, so that we can with truth, say, “He has saved us?” (1 Tim. i. 9; Tit. iii. 5—7.)—

Do we not only in profession, but in reality, receive him as our rightful and righteous King and Governor? That is; Do we place our expectations and confidence in him for deliverance and protection from all our enemies? Do we subject ourselves to his authority and rule? Do we observe and obey all his laws?—

Do we receive him as our final Judge? That is; persuaded that we shall stand at his judgment-seat, do we prepare for his coming, not daring to rest without a title to, and meetness for, his heavenly kingdom?—

It is implied in these questions, that we receive his doctrine as the rule of our faith, experience and practice.—His merits, his obedience unto death, and not any holiness or works of our own, as the ground of our confidence and hope for justification and acceptance now, and at the day of judgment.—His Spirit, without which we “are none of his.” and not our own endeavours, as the source of our power, holiness, and comfort, and that we pray earnestly and importunately for his influences, and rely on them.—His example as the pattern set for our imitation, (1 Pet. ii. 21,) and the standard to which we must bring our spirit and conduct.—His exaltation and glory, and not the glory of this world, or any thing temporal, as the ultimate object of

our desire, expectation, and pursuit. Is it true that we thus receive him? If so, happy are we; for observe,

III. THE GREAT PRIVILEGE THEY OBTAIN WHO RECEIVE HIM.

“To as many as received him, to them gave he power,” (ἐξουσίαν,) *privilege*, “to become the sons of God.”—

He, the Son of God in a peculiar sense, became the Son of man, that the sons of men might become sons of God; (Gal. iv. 5;) that they might not only stand related to him as subjects to their king, or servants to their master, but as sons to their father.—They are unspeakably *near* to him, not as constituted his children merely by adoption, but as being made such also by regeneration; for they are “born not of blood,” by descent from Abraham; “nor by the will of the flesh,” by natural generation; or by the power of corrupt nature, “nor by the will of man,” by the administration of circumcision or baptism, “but of God,” by his Spirit creating them anew. And they are actual partakers of his nature. (1 John v. 1.)—They are *dear* to him above all others. They are favoured with such liberty of access to him and intercourse with him as are allowed to no other men. They are taken under his protection, direction, and care, in a peculiar sense. They are amply provided with all things needful and useful for soul or body, even here in this world.—They are constituted *his heirs*, as to another world, and “joint heirs with Christ” of all he is and has; heirs of his unsearchable riches, glory, and felicity. Such is the privilege even of babes in Christ.

But we must not be satisfied with the state of babes, a state of ignorance, comparatively speaking; of inexperience, weakness, and instability; but we must proceed to the state of young men and fathers; nay, even to the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” (Eph. iv. 13.) In order to this the ministry of the word is appointed; (Eph. iv. 11, 12;) we must “desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby;” (1 Pet. ii. 2;) we must shun what would injure our spiritual health; and use the strength received, “exercising ourselves unto godliness.” (1 Tim. iv. 7.) — —

INFERENCES.

We learn from this subject the true nature of that faith in Christ whereof cometh salvation. (John iii. 15, 16, 18, 36; Acts xvi. 31.) It is the receiving of Christ in all his various offices and characters as above explained.—

We see how we ought to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith? We must inquire whether we thus receive Christ.

Those who do not thus receive him, whatever speculative, self-righteous, or Antinomian faith, they may profess or possess, are not the children of God. — —

All who do thus receive Jesus Christ are the children of God, although, through want of a proper acquaintance with the Scriptures, they may have been doubtful about this most important of all points; and they should from hence take encouragement. — —

Those who do not receive Christ, as above stated, reject him, and acquire aggravated guilt. (John xv. 22.)

CII.

NO ADMISSION TO HEAVEN BUT BY THE
NEW BIRTH.

JOHN III. 5, 6.

Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

WHETHER we consider the nature of the doctrine here taught by our Lord, or the solemn and emphatic manner in which it was delivered, it plainly appears to be of the deepest importance, and of universal concern. It was first declared to Nicodemus, “a ruler of the Jews,” a member of the great council, termed the Sanhedrim. (John vii. 50.) He, having heard of the fame of Christ’s miracles, and probably seen some of them, and being thereby fully satisfied of his divine mission, made him a visit in person, that he might be more distinctly informed of his doctrine, and of the true intent and purpose of his coming. But it seems, through shame, and fear of his brethren of the council, who from the beginning had been Christ’s enemies, he came privately, and “by night,” and giving him the title of respect, with which it was usual to address the Jewish doctors, he said, “Rabbi, we know,” or, *it is known*, “that thou art a teacher come from God.”—The wonders thou hast done, so beneficial and divine in all respects, fully demonstrate that thou art invested, in an

extraordinary manner, with power from on high. I am come, therefore, as if he had said, to desire of thee a more particular account, both of the doctrine which thou teachest, and of the kingdom which thou declarest God is about to erect.

Our Lord, in his answer, touches on the grand points, in which it was of the utmost importance that Nicodemus, his brethren, and mankind in general, should be well informed, *viz* that no external profession, no ceremonial observances, no distinction of birth, could entitle any to the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom; but that an entire change of heart, as well as of life, was necessary for that purpose; that this could only be wrought in man by the Spirit of God; that every man born into the world, was, by nature, (ver. 6,) in a state of depravity and sin, of condemnation and misery; (ver. 17—19;) that the free mercy of God had given his Son to deliver them from this state, (ver. 14—16,) and to raise them to a blessed immortality; that all mankind, Gentiles and Jews, might share in these benefits, procured by his being lifted up upon the cross, and received by faith in him; but that if they rejected him, their eternal aggravated condemnation would be the certain consequence.

Having thus briefly analysed our Lord's conference with Nicodemus, let us return to the words of the text, and inquire,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

This expression, which is found so often in the New Testament, seems to have been borrowed from the book

of Daniel; (ch. ii. 44; vii. 13, 14;) and hence it was in common use among the Jews, (Luke xvii. 20; xix. 11;) and they justly supposed it to mean the kingdom of the Messiah; only, that they had wrong ideas of that kingdom, imagining, in the pride and carnality of their hearts, and in direct opposition to many passages of their own Scriptures, that it would be of an earthly and temporal nature, obtained, enlarged, and established, as such kingdoms commonly are, by human policy, and power,—by war, slaughter, and conquest.

The kingdom of the Messiah is termed the kingdom of God, because by, and under, the Messiah, the kingdom of Satan is overthrown, men are rescued from his power, (Acts xxvi. 18,) and made the subjects of God, who reigns among them, in them, and over them, and the kingdom of God is set up on earth, and displayed in power and glory. This kingdom is to be considered in two parts; in a state of infancy, imperfection, and warfare, on earth, in which it is continually receiving fresh subjects, making fresh conquests, and is enlarged more and more; and in a state of maturity and full perfection, in heaven. In other words, it comprises the state of things, first, in the church militant, and then in the church triumphant. The former is meant, Matt. xii. 28; xxi. 43; Mark x. 14, 15; xv. 43; 1 Cor. iv. 20; Rom. xiv. 17; in most of which passages it includes the reign, both of the Gospel or the truth, and of the grace of God or true religion.

This latter, without which no one can be a member of the true Church of Christ here or hereafter, and which is chiefly meant in this place by the kingdom of God, is well explained (Rom. xiv. 17) as consisting in

“righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost;” “righteousness,” imputed to Christ’s subjects, (Rom. iv. 1—8,) for he justifies them through faith in his merits; implanted in them, (Eph. iv. 22—24,) because he sanctifies them by his Spirit; practised by them, (1 John iii. 7,) because he rules them by his laws:—“peace,” because, being justified, they have “peace with God;” being renewed and obedient, they have peace of conscience; and being under his protection and care, and enabled to confide therein, and “cast their care on him,” they have tranquillity of mind: (Isai. xxvi. 3; Phil. iv. 6, 7:)—“joy,” of faith in illumination, and “discovery of blessings to be received in Christ Jesus;” (Matt. xiii. 44—47;) of love, in the possession and enjoyment of some of these blessings; and of hope, in the expected reversion, and remainder of them. —

The kingdom of God in heaven, (1 Cor. vi. 9; xv. 50; 2 Thess. i. 5;) is finally intended; from which Satan will be for ever excluded, where sin shall never enter, misery have no place, and death be no more. The subjects of this kingdom will be perfect in soul, and in body; the world in which they shall dwell will be good, without mixture of evil and imperfection; the society to which they will be admitted, will be the wisest, and greatest, and best, of men, and the angels; there will be the presence and enjoyment of God and the Lamb; there the saints will be possessed of the most extensive knowledge, of perfect holiness, happiness, and glory; there they will be “Kings and Priests” unto God. —

II. IN WHAT SENSE MUST WE BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT, THAT WE MAY ENTER INTO THIS KINGDOM.

These figurative expressions must not be taken literally, as our Lord intimates in ver. 8, and declares on another occasion. (John vi. 63.) To be “born of water,” implies,—the being baptized, an ordinance which Jesus Christ has given us no authority to neglect. (Mark xvi. 16.) When administered by the Apostles to adults, it was only to such as repented and believed; (Acts ii. 38; viii. 36, 37;) and hence it was considered as an outward and visible sign of their being washed from their past sins, God pardoning all penitent and believing souls. (Acts xxii. 16.) It also implies, therefore,—the being washed from our past sins, in consequence of repentance and faith, not only emblematically by the sign, but really by the thing signified, *viz.* the blood of Christ, applied by the Spirit, and received by faith. (John xiii. 8. This is a relative change, a change of state, the person before under guilt being hereby acquitted; the person before under wrath, being taken into favour with God; the person who was before merely a servant, serving God from fear, and with reluctance, being hereby made a son and an heir. (Rom. viii. 14—17; Gal. iv. 4—7.) — —

To be “born of the Spirit,” is not merely a relative but a real change; a change of nature, termed, 2 Cor. v. 17; Gal. vi. 15, (*καινή κτίσις*), *a new creation*, and described, (Eph. iv. 22, 23,) as “putting off the old man, being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new man, which is created after God in righteousness and true holiness.” The ground and reason

of which doctrine is evident; man by the fall lost the image of God, especially his moral image, and without recovering it, without becoming pure in heart and life, he cannot “see the Lord.” (Heb. xii. 14; Matt. v. 8; 2 Cor. v. 3.)—It is not only an external, but also an internal change; not a mere reformation of manners, but a change of principles and dispositions, termed a new heart and spirit; (Psal. li. 10; Ezek. xxxvi. 26.) If regeneration here mean only *reformation* of life, our Lord, instead of making any new discovery, has only thrown a great deal of obscurity on what was before plain and obvious, and known, not only to the Jews, but to the wiser heathen.”* The judgment, the choice, the intention, the affection, the objects of desire and love, of aversion and hatred, must be different from what they were before. It is not a partial, but a universal change; “Old things having passed away, all things must become new.” Every faculty of the mind, and every disposition of the heart, as well as the outward conversation and behaviour must be the subject of a divine change. The soul must not be left under the power of any sin, inward or outward; of omission or commission; but must be turned from the practice of all sin, to the practice of all righteousness. — — It is a progressive change. (Tit. iii. 5; 2 Cor. iv. 16; Col. ii. 19; Eph. iv. 15.) — —

This change is termed a *birth*, because it may be illustrated by the natural birth.—[See Plan XXVI. Vol. I. p. 230.

* Dr. Owen.

III. INTO THE GROUND, NECESSITY, REASONABLENESS,
AND HAPPY CONSEQUENCES, OF THIS BIRTH.

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh.”

“Flesh” here means not so much our animal and mortal, in opposition to our rational and immortal nature, as it means our depraved nature. (Gen. vi. 3; viii. 21; Rom. viii. 8, 9; Gal. v. 16.) The reason of this is, that man having, by sin, lost the indwelling of the Spirit of God, with the light, power, purity, and comfort flowing from it, whereby his soul maintained a superiority to bodily pleasures, is sunk under the dominion of his senses, appetites, and passions, and become flesh.—All, born into the world, are in this state.—All are “*earthly*,” being overcome by the love of the present world, their thoughts, desires, cares, and pursuits, having ever a relation to it; “*sensual*,” being impure, unholy, seeking happiness in carnal pleasure, or in the gratification of the appetites and passions, and in committing, perhaps, gross sin; “*devilish*,” being proud, self-willed, discontented, impatient, angry, envious, malicious, revengeful.—They are, therefore, naturally unfit to be subjects of the kingdom of Christ, either here or hereafter. (Rom. viii. 5—9; Eph. v. 5.)—Hence arises the necessity of our being born again, that we may be members of Christ’s kingdom in this world and another. It is not enough that a new name be given us; that a new profession is assumed, that we are descended from pious ancestors, that we have been devoted to God in infancy, and born of baptismal water; or that in our riper years we have renewed our christian profession, and ratified our baptismal covenant, in the rite of confirmation; or that we are moral and charitable

22 *No Admission to Heaven but by the New Birth.*

in our life;—still, provided we are only born of the *flesh*, we are but *flesh*. — —

“That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

The Spirit having begotten us again, and inwardly changed us, we become spiritual.—Endued *with the Holy Spirit; (Rom. viii. 9;) with the life, light, power, purity, and comfort, which he imparts —Free from the dominion of the flesh, *i. e.* of our animal and corrupt nature, its senses, appetites, and passions; as also, and of course, from the power of the Devil and the world. Hence we become *heavenly*, overcoming the world, (1 John v. 4, 5,) esteeming, desiring, and pursuing chiefly heavenly things; *holy*, not committing sin, (1 John iii. 9,) having power over it, and over “the law in the members;” (Rom. vii. 23;) walking “not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” (Rom. viii. 1,) “crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts,” and “led by the Spirit;” (Gal. v. 16—25;) *divine*, resembling God in love and in all its fruits. (1 John iv. 7, 8, 16.)—We thus are made fit subjects for the kingdom of Christ, on earth and in heaven. — —

IV. HOW WE MAY EXPERIENCE THIS NEW BIRTH.

We learn from our text that the author of it is the Spirit of God; the means by which it is effected are the Word of God; (1 Pet. i. 23; Jam. i. 18; John xvii. 17;) the instrumental cause of it is faith. (John i. 12; 13; Gal. iii. 26; 1 John v. 1; 2 Thess. ii. 13.)

We conclude, therefore, by exhorting you to—pray for the Spirit, sincerely, earnestly, importunately, perseveringly, believingly.—Attend the word, hearing it,

and reading it, with seriousness, and after-meditation. Exercise faith in the Gospel, in Christ, and in the promises. — —

CIII.

NATURE AND CAUSES OF THE NEW BIRTH.

JOHN III. 7.

Ye must be born again.

So says He who came down from heaven to teach us the way thither; He who is infinitely wise, and cannot be deceived himself; inviolably faithful, and cannot deceive us: He to whom the Father bore testimony from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him;” and concerning whom the Holy Ghost commanded, long before, by Moses, “Him shall ye hear, and it shall come to pass, if any man will not hearken to that Prophet, he shall be destroyed from among the people.”—*He* affirms in the most express terms, “Ye must be born again.”

And lest we should think that he rashly affirmed, what upon second thoughts he would soften or retract, or that the point was of little importance, and might be disregarded without hazard. he repeats the same declaration again and again, in different forms of expression, prefacing it each time with a *verily, verily*. Thus, (ver. 3,) “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;” and again, (ver. 5,) Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he

cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Surely then it highly concerns all the followers of Jesus, who desire and expect the kingdom of God, if they would not have their desires to become abortive, and their expectations to perish, thoroughly to understand the doctrine of the New Birth, that they may know, whether they themselves are born of God, and if not, that they may seek this experience without delay.

With a view to assist you, by the divine blessing, in this most important inquiry, I purpose to consider,

I. THE NATURE OF THE NEW BIRTH.

II. THE CAUSES OF IT, OR HOW IT IS OBTAINED.

III. I SHALL APPLY AND IMPROVE THE SUBJECT.

But, before I proceed, let me exhort you to divest your minds of prejudice, and weigh with calmness and impartiality what shall be delivered. Endeavour to lie open to conviction, be not afraid to have your wounds probed, and your state examined; but rather say from the heart, “Lord I beseech thee, search me and try me, and see what way of wickedness there is in me;” If I never yet experienced the New Birth, O discover it to me, that I may deceive myself no longer: and especially attend in a spirit of prayer, remembering, “every good and perfect gift cometh from above,” and that, “if any man lack wisdom,” he must “ask it of God,” who only can make us “wise unto salvation.”

In considering THE NATURE OF THE NEW BIRTH, I shall make some observations, first, in general, and then more particularly.

In general, we may observe, it is a real, great, and surprising change, which must pass upon all men who are admitted into heaven; a change, not of our profession, or way of worship, from one sect or party to another; not of our opinions; from one way of thinking to another; not barely of our outward conduct, from one manner of living, of speaking, and acting, to another. It not only implies that we “cease to do evil and learn to do well,” break off our actual sins, attend outward ordinances, and do temporal good to the bodies and souls of men. But it is a change of heart as well as of life, of our inward principles, as well as of the outward conduct proceeding therefrom. It implies that we make the tree good, that the fruit may be good also; that the fountain be healed. that the streams which issue thence may be pure and wholesome.

This change signified in our text by being born again, is called in some passages of Scripture, “a new creation,” because it is a renewal of our souls, with all their faculties, after the image of him that created us. All these are naturally depraved by sin, and must be purified by grace, which is done when we are born again. Our understanding, naturally darkened, is made “light in the Lord.” Our will, naturally perverse and rebellious, is converted, so that it acquiesces and coincides with the holy will of God. Our conscience, which in our unregenerate state, is either “seared as with a hot iron,” or defiled with guilt, is truly awakened, rightly informed, and also sprinkled from evil. Hence it no longer condemns, but acquits us, and testifies that “in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have our conversation in the world.” Our passions and appetites, before irregu-

lar and disorderly, are now restored to order and regularity. The former flow to God in an even and constant stream; not resting in contentment with the creature, but proceeding forward to the Creator, the source of all true felicity, and the inexhaustible ocean of good. The latter are in due subjection to reason, which is in itself subject to divine grace. Now, the heart being thus changed, the life will be changed of course. Piety towards God, and justice, mercy, and truth, towards our fellow creatures, will be cultivated in all their branches, and we shall be "holy in all manner of conversation."

One thing more I would observe, in general, great as this change is, and manifest from its effects, we must confess it is, in many respects, incomprehensible and inexplicable. I not only mean with regard to the unregenerate, (it is no wonder it should be incomprehensible to them, since "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,") but also to the regenerate themselves, to those who have experienced it. Even they cannot fully comprehend the manner in which this change is wrought, much less can they fully explain it to others. "Who knoweth," saith Solomon, "the way of the Spirit, or how the bones grow in the womb of her that is with child." I suppose all physicians will allow that natural generation is, in many points, mysterious; much more is spiritual generation. But yet we cannot doubt that a child is born into the world, when we both see it with our eyes, hear it with our ears, and feel it with our hands, though we cannot fully understand and explain how it was formed and finished. Just so, we cannot doubt that a person is born of God,

when our senses testify that his tempers, words, and works, are all spiritual and holy, that he lives to God, and "walks as Christ also walked," though we cannot fully understand or explain how this change has been wrought. This, it is probable, our Lord intended to teach us, when he said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof;" thou art assured that it blows, for thou hearest it with thy ears, feelest it upon thy body, and seest the effects of it with thy eyes, "yet thou canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth;" the precise point where it begins to blow, and where it ceases; "so is every one that is born of the Spirit;" thou mayest be assured of the fact, though thou canst not fully understand the manner of it.

But let us be a little more particular here. I have observed that as real, as great, and as discernible a change passes upon a soul when born of God, as passes upon a child when born into the world. Let us examine this point more narrowly. Reflect for a moment upon the state of an unborn child, and see how it resembles the condition of the unregenerate. Before a child is born, it is an entire stranger to this world; the persons and things in it are utterly unknown. It has no perception of them. It sees not the light, hears not the sounds, and feels not the objects of this world. It has no sensation, and, therefore, no ideas of the world, or any thing therein. Hence it can form no judgment about it, and possesses no knowledge respecting the nature or value of things on earth, and is of course unconcerned about them; they raise no emotions in its mind, and have no influence upon its passions. It feels no desire

after, or delight in, those things which living men account useful and excellent. It is neither happy in possessing, nor distressed at losing, the good things of the world. They are unknown to it, and, therefore do not affect it. But it sleeps on still, and takes its rest, though all is activity and bustle around. To whatever dangers it may be exposed, it is unconscious of them, and has no fears concerning them. It has no share at all in the ordinary desires and apprehensions, joys and sorrows, cares and employments of living men. The reason of this is not because the things of this world are far from it; for they surround it on every side. The light, and heat, and air of this world operate upon it, and are, indeed, absolutely necessary to its formation and growth. It subsists by food received from the world, and other sensible things are at no great distance from it. But it is a stranger to those things, partly because a thick veil interposes between it and the world, and partly because its eyes, and ears, and other senses, are not yet employed and exercised about their proper objects.

How exactly similar hereto is the state of a person not born of God! He is a stranger to the spiritual world. God, and the things of God, are unknown to him; or he has, at least, not any saving acquaintance with them. He does not know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." He does not set the Lord always before him, or endure as "seeing him that is invisible." He does not "stand upon his watch-tower," or wait to hear "what God will say to his soul." He does not "taste that the Lord is gracious," or "feel the powers of the world to come." He has no real perception of spiritual things, and can, therefore, form

no true judgment about them. He understands not their nature nor value, and is quite as ill qualified to reason concerning them, as a blind man is to judge of colours, or a deaf man of music.

He knows not the beauty of holiness, its native excellency and happy tendency, and therefore, does not desire or pursue it, but rather manifests a hatred and aversion to it. He perceives not the deformity of sin, its evil nature and fatal consequences, and, therefore, instead of hating and avoiding it, as a destructive monster, he fondly courts, and cordially embraces it, as a lovely object. The goodness and all-sufficiency of God being unknown to him, he neither loves nor seeks him, but his carnal mind, which is enmity to the blessed God, disposes him to say to his Maker, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." He sees not the vanity of the world, its unsatisfactory nature, or short duration, and, therefore, does not shun its friendship, or guard against its enticements, but yields himself up the willing captive of its deceitful charms. In short, he does not love nor desire those things which living Christians account excellent, nor does he hate and abhor the things they esteem evil and pernicious. He is not happy in possessing, or distressed at losing, the divine presence or favour, or any other spiritual blessing. The things of God are unknown to him, and, therefore, do not affect him.

But he sleeps on still, and takes his rest, though all is busy and active about him. While all creation labours, and every creature seems to employ itself, according to its nature, in fulfilling the purposes of its existence, man only is insensible of his best interests, and neglects the pursuit of them. He who, of all crea-

tures, has most need to awake and exert himself; who has a heaven of unutterable and eternal happiness to attain, a hell of extreme and endless misery to shun; who, in order thereto, has a pardon to sue for in the court of heaven, and obtain; his whole soul to wash from his filthiness in the "fountain opened for sin and uncleanness," and being "renewed in the spirit of his mind" to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." He, who must be "sanctified wholly in body, soul, and spirit," who must be stripped of all his sinful tempers, words, and works, and clothed with the whole image of God in righteousness and true holiness, or he is not meet for, and, of consequence, cannot possess, "the inheritance of the saints in light." He who has innumerable enemies, subtle, powerful, and malicious, perpetually exerting themselves to the utmost, to hinder his restoration, or seal up his damnation; and who has but a short and uncertain time wherein to do this great work, not so much as one hour being insured to him. He that ought to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, and give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, still sleeps in thoughtless security and unconcern.

Though he stands on slippery places, or rather hangs by the slender thread of life over the pit of eternal darkness, a thread which every moment is in danger of breaking, and, if it does, he drops, and sinks, and rises no more: though "hell is moved from beneath to meet him," and all its black fiends wait to seize and hurry his departing soul away to their dreary dwellings; though the Father affectionately demands, "Why will you die?" and compassionately cries, "Turn and

live:" though the Son spreads his bleeding hands, and shows the healing stream, issuing from his side, kindly inviting, "Ho, every one that thirsts, come unto me, and drink:" though he stands without, knocking at the door of the heart, till "his head is filled with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night." and earnestly entreats admission: in short, though the Spirit of grace strives, though good men weep, angels tremble, and devils rejoice at the sight of his misery and danger; yet still he says, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to rest."—

Now, if you inquire into the reason of this insensibility and stupidity respecting spiritual things, it is not that God and the spiritual world are at a great distance from him. O no! they surround him on every hand; he lives, and moves, and has his being in God, while heaven and hell are not far off; but above, beneath, around, and on every side; yea, he need but drop the thin mask of flesh to find himself instantly in the one or the other. But the reason is partly the veil of unbelief conceals the invisible world from him, and partly he resists the divine Spirit who waits to open his blind eyes, unstop his deaf ears, and give him a wise and understanding heart; to reveal to him the things of God, which can only be known by the Spirit of God.

But how is the case altered when the sinner is born of God, as it is also altered with a child when born into the world! Before its birth, the child is indebted to this world (under God) for its formation, life, and growth, as was observed above. But it knows it not, and is still a stranger to this world, till, being come to its maturity, it struggles for enlargement, and issuing forth, appears amongst us. This is no sooner the case,

than it exists as in another state, and lives in a very different manner from what it did before. Every obstruction being removed, the various senses with which it is furnished are immediately presented with their proper objects. The light which was before excluded, now flows in upon its eyes, and painting upon the retina the images of outward objects, amazes and delights it with numberless ideas, it before knew nothing of. The air pours in upon its lungs, and by alternately dilating and contracting the muscles of the heart, propels the blood, and causes it to circulate throughout the whole body. Thus sensibility, vigour, and health, are diffused through the whole frame. The endless diversity of sounds, which traverse the air, find admittance into its ears, and by means of the auditory nerve, in a manner equally surprising and incomprehensible, give notices of themselves to the brain, and thus convey intelligence and entertainment to the soul. In short, it tastes, smells, and feels, and by one or more of the senses, perceives the various objects where-with it is surrounded, and testifies the satisfaction it experiences by its countenance, gestures, voice, and its whole behaviour.

It is true its sensations are weak, faint, and confused, in comparison of what they shall be if it lives and has health. It does not see so clearly, hear so distinctly, or enjoy any sense in that perfection, it shall do by and by. Neither does it, at first, so well understand what use to make of its perceptions, as it shall afterwards. With proper care and nourishment, it will increase in stature and strength. It will gain more and more experience every day, and continually advance in its acquaintance with the persons and

things of the world. And it will soon begin to reason and judge concerning them, and, of course, be suitably affected with them. It will manifest the passions of love and hatred, hope and fear, like other men. It will engage in the business and employments, and bear a part in the cares and concerns, joys and sorrows, of the rest of mankind. It will think, and speak, and act, like all its fellow-creatures.

And now let us see how this illustrates the case of a person born of God. Before a person experiences this change, as I have already intimated, he lives, moves, and has his being in God; he is supported by his presence, fed, so to speak, at his table, and nourished by his bounty. But then he is unconscious of it. "The ox," indeed, "knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know," mankind "do not consider." Nay, the Lord, by his spirit, enlightens his mind, awakens his conscience, alarms his fears, begets in him a sense of sorrow for his sins, and thus causes him to feel, as it were, the pangs of the New Birth; but he is, perhaps, at a loss to know what is the matter with him; he cannot tell "why he is thus," and, therefore, does not take the proper method for deliverance, and, in consequence, God's work, for the present, appears to be abortive; he is not born again. But suppose, (knowing his condition,) "the captive exile hastens that he may be loosed, and that he may not die in the pit." Suppose the sinner struggles in faith and prayer, and wrestles with God for his blessing. Then he does not fail to hear, and answer, and come to his rescue. The prison doors are thrown open, the chains of the prisoner are knocked off; his soul is brought into the broad day-light of the

Gospel, and put into the possession of the glorious "liberty of the children of God."

Then, the veil of unbelief being rent, and the eyes of his understanding being opened, he is conscious of the divine presence, and "Thou God seest me," is the language of his heart. He "beholds what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon him, that he should be called a child of God," and he "loves God who hath first loved" him. Yes; having heard the voice of Christ, speaking to his heart by his word and Spirit, "Son be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee," he gladly believes the welcome message, and, by faith, "*tastes* that the Lord is gracious," and even *feels* the mighty energy of his Spirit "shedding abroad the love of God in his heart," and "filling him with peace and joy through believing." Thus he is no longer a stranger to the spiritual world, to him who begat, or to those who are begotten of him. But he confidently cries, "Abba, Father," and calls "Jesus, Lord, by the Holy Ghost." From his inmost soul, he says, "Lord, I will praise thee, for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me: Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid." Thus breathing praise to God in return for his mercies, and, by faith and prayer, "drawing water out of the wells of salvation," or deriving out of Christ's fulness "grace to help in time of need;" as the blood circulates throughout the human body, and diffuses life and health through the animal frame, so do the divine light and love circulate through all the powers of the regenerate soul, and diffuse holiness and happiness throughout his whole nature. Hence, he "grows in grace, and in the

knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," till he arrives at "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," till he becomes "a perfect man in Christ Jesus."—In short, things spiritual and divine are discovered to him, in a variety of ways, as they were not before, and he exists in another state, and lives in a very different manner, and this he manifests by his very countenance, but especially by his tempers, his language, and behaviour.

It is true, his perceptions of spiritual things are, at first, weak, faint, and confused, in comparison of what they shall be. He has not so clear and full an acquaintance with God, and the things of God, or such intimate union with him, as he shall have by and by. Nor can he, at first, so well understand what use to make of his faith, or the spiritual objects revealed thereby, as he shall afterwards. With proper care and nourishment he will enjoy health of soul, and will receive strength to do the works which are appointed him to do: he will increase in wisdom, holiness, and happiness, and become "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Care and sustenance he will obtain from God himself, his heavenly Father, and those whom God hath appointed to watch over his soul, the elder brethren and sisters in his Father's family. He will be led by God's Spirit, protected by his power, and fed with the manna of his love. He must eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood, not only sacramentally, but also spiritually, and derive from him grace to supply his various and daily necessities. He must "receive the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby." and must attend all those means of divine institution, which are the ordinary channels of spiritual

communications. Thus will he daily gain more and more experience in the ways of God, and increasing acquaintance with the spiritual world.

Moreover, he is now enabled to judge aright concerning spiritual subjects, and is duly affected with them. He sees the deformity of sin, its infinite evil and pernicious effects, and wonders how he could ever embrace a thing so horrible, or drink, as a pleasant draught, such deadly poison. He sees the beauty of holiness, and is amazed at his former strange aversion to it; he pants after it with his whole soul. The world no longer deceives, and he now confesses his folly in pursuing, so long, such an empty phantom. The divine perfections, and the love of Jesus, being displayed to the eye of his faith, he views his Saviour as "altogether lovely, the fairest among ten thousand;" and struck at his former indifference, he complains,—

"Ah! why did I so late thee know,—
Thee, lovelier than the sons of men!
Ah! why did I no sooner go
To thee, the only ease in pain!
Asham'd I sigh, and inly mourn,
That I so late to thee did turn."

He trembles while he reflects upon his former danger, while he considers on what a precipice he stood, every moment liable to fall over the brink of death, into the pit of bottomless perdition. He sees the worth of heaven, the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory wherewith God will recompense the momentary labours and sufferings of this present time. Hence he descends to endure with patience and resignation, every trial and affliction appointed him, and rises also upon the wings of desire and hope, that he may execute with

zeal and fidelity his Lord's pleasure, and finish the work given him to do. In short, he manifests all the affections and tempers of a child of God, he loves and hates, hopes and fears, rejoices and mourns, like a living Christian, and participates in all his desires and pursuits, his cares, exercises, and employments. He "lives in the Spirit, and walks in the Spirit;" he speaks the language of Canaan, and does the works of his Lord, making the divine will the rule of his conduct, and God's glory the end of all his actions.—

I now proceed to consider, in a few words, **THE CAUSES OF THIS NEW BIRTH** we have been describing.

And, 1st, I observe the primary and original cause of this change is, the love of God the Father, which is indeed the one source of all our mercies, whether temporal, spiritual, or eternal. He it is who "supplies our every need, according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus," (Phil. iv. 19,) especially, *he* it is who "blesseth us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Jesus Christ." That love of God which "withheld not from us his only Son," but freely "delivered him up for us all," through him also "freely gives us all things." In particular he is the Author of this New Birth we are considering. "For," says St. James, "of his own will begat he us by the word of truth;" a testimony confirmed by St. John, not only in those many passages of his Gospel and First Epistle, in which he speaks of our being "begotten" and "born of God;" but also and especially, in that well known passage of his Gospel, (ch. i. 13,) where, mentioning the children of God, he says, they are "born not of

blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." To these declarations, if need were, I might add the testimony of St. Peter, who in the first chapter of his First Epistle, "blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for begetting" his children again, "of his abundant mercy," and thereby teaches us to whom we must principally ascribe this great work. For this reason it is, that he is styled the *Father* of all that are born again, and they are denominated his *children*; not only because he mercifully adopts them into his family, but likewise graciously regenerates them by his power. And thus are they stamped with his divine image, in which we were originally formed, possessed of his holy nature, and so fitted to reign in his eternal kingdom.

We must not, however, forget here, that though the love of the Father is represented in Scripture as the primary and *original* cause of the New Birth, yet the influences of the Spirit of grace are its immediate and *efficient* cause. Hence we are said by St. John, to be "born of the Spirit," and by St. Paul, to be renewed by the Holy Ghost. *He*, by his immediate agency, enlightens the understanding, awakens the conscience, converts the will, disposes the affections, and inflames them with divine love. As a "Spirit of bondage," convincing us of sin, and begetting in our souls a godly sorrow for it, he begins this great change; and as a "Spirit of adoption," crying in our hearts, *Abba, Father*, and making us conformable to the image of God's dear Son, he perfects this work, when we are properly *born of God*. And then it still remains that we be led "by the Spirit," as the Spirit of light, of love, and comfort, into all wisdom, holiness, and hap-

piness, till we arrive at “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” and “stand complete in all the will of God.”

Again, it must be observed, that as the Spirit of grace, springing from the loving-kindness of God, our Father, is the chief agent in this work, and properly its *efficient* cause; so (as St. Paul testifies, Tit. iii. 6,) this Spirit is “shed on us through Jesus Christ our Saviour,” who is the alone meritorious cause of *this*, as well as of all our mercies.—Not for the sake of our past works, done before this change, which are no better in the sight of God than filthy rags, because they spring not from a principle of love, nor for the sake of our *future* works foreseen, in order to which we are indeed created anew in Christ Jesus, but which are still very deficient, if compared with the spirituality and extent of the law of innocence, and are, therefore, only accepted when offered up to God upon the altar of the Redeemer’s merits; nor yet for the sake of our present goodness of heart and life, which, in fact, does not exist—I mean we have no goodness—till this change has past upon us, previous to which, our hearts are “desperately wicked,” and “to every good work reprobate;”—not, I say, for the sake of any thing that has been, is now, or hereafter shall be, in us, or done by us, does the Father communicate to us his regenerating Spirit, but merely in consideration of the meritorious life and death of his well beloved Son, “in whom he is always well pleased,” and for whose sake only he is well pleased *with us*. “*Through him*” it is, that we “being justified by faith, have peace with God;” have “access into a state of favour with God,” obtain a freedom from condemnation and the Spirit of

life, to deliver us from the law of sin and death. (Rom. v. 1, 2; viii. 1, 2.) And of consequence, through him it is that we are regenerated, made the children of God, and the heirs of glory.

I mean by all this to signify, that as we are naturally *miserable* creatures, and, therefore, objects of divine pity; *helpless* creatures, and, therefore, subjects of divine aid; so we are *guilty* creatures, and, therefore, exposed to the divine displeasure. I mean to intimate, that God is a being of such unspotted holiness, inflexible justice, and inviolable truth, and that we are so depraved, so deceitful, and so guilty, that the Father, notwithstanding his infinite compassion and love towards us, cannot regenerate or bestow any blessing upon us, consistently with his divine perfections, and the unchangeable authority of his holy law, but in and through his only begotten Son. *He*, by fulfilling all righteousness in his life, hath magnified the Law, and made it honourable, and by suffering its penalty, which we had incurred, in his death, hath made peace for us, and opened “a new and living way into the holiest” of all; whence “through him we have access, by one Spirit, unto the Father,” and receive “privilege to become the children of God.”

Having spoken of the *original, efficient* and *meritorious* causes of the New Birth, I must not forget to mention also its *instrumental* cause. This is two-fold: on God’s part it is the *truth*; on our part, though not without the grace of God, it is *faith*. Thus St. Peter tells us, we are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever;” a declaration confirmed by St. James, where he says, in the passage quoted above, “Of his

own will begat he us by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." But as the word of divine truth, preached to our outward ears, can no more produce holiness in us, unless it be received into our hearts by faith, than seed sown by the way-side can produce fruit, after it has been picked up by the birds; therefore, faith on our part must be included in the instrumental cause of the New Birth, as well as the truth on the part of God. Agreeably with this, our Lord speaks of "knowing," or believing, "the truth, that it may make us free;" and St. Peter, of our "purifying our souls by obeying the truth;" which are expressions of a similar import with those of St. Paul, when speaking of the Gospel, he says, it is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." Faith is absolutely needful to effect this change, from beginning to end. We cannot receive even the spirit of bondage, cannot be truly convinced of sin, without faith in God's threatenings denounced against it. And we cannot be convinced of righteousness, cannot receive the Spirit of adoption, without faith in the promises. And it is, above all, necessary, in order to our being born again, that we believe on Christ, or that being convinced of his willingness and ability to save, and our need of him, we make application to him, and put our trust in him, that he "may dwell in our hearts by faith," and work this great work in us. Thus we are said, by the Apostle to the Galatians, to be "the children of God by faith in Christ." And to the same purpose, St. John assures us, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

These are the principal causes which necessarily and immediately concur in forming the New Birth. I might likewise mention other subordinate causes, or helps rather, which are occasionally useful, and remotely necessary. Such are, afflictions, persecutions, temptations, which tend to discover us to ourselves, and wean us from the world; hearing, prayer, meditation, watching, self-denial, and mortification, which are helps to faith, and the holiness consequent upon it. But having already dwelt sufficiently on this head of instruction, I hasten to what will, I trust, be more useful, *viz.*

AN APPLICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF WHAT HAS BEEN ADVANCED.

I have endeavoured, my Brethren, to give you a plain and scriptural account of the New Birth, with this view, that while you understand and admit what is spoken, you may examine yourselves, and find out whether you are, or are not born of God. Let me, then, sum up what has been advanced by way of inquiry, and ask, Are you persuaded that a real, deep, and universal change has passed upon your soul? Is your *understanding* enlightened, your *will* subdued, your *affections* raised from earth to heaven? Are you “translated out of darkness into his marvellous light,” out “of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God’s dear Son?” Or are you a stranger to the whole matter, and at a loss to know whether this is the case or not? If so, you have great reason to think you are not yet born of God; for as sure as a child cannot come into the world without being conscious of its existence in it, and as sure as Lazarus could not be raised from

the dead without being sensible of so great a change, so sure must you know when this spiritual birth is brought forth in you, and when you “are passed from death unto life.”—For your further satisfaction, I ask each one present, Wast thou ever deeply convinced thou wast not born again, and distressed on that account? Did guilt burden thy soul, and fear and sorrow oppress thy spirits? Didst thou find trouble and heaviness, and so call upon the name of the Lord, saying, “Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul?” Didst thou ever feel the pangs of the New Birth? Didst thou ever receive the spirit of bondage convincing thee of sin, of its evil nature, and destructive tendency? And didst thou ever tremble and mourn under an apprehension of the dishonour thou hadst done to God, and the ruin thou hadst brought upon thy own soul? In consequence hereof, did “the snares of death compass thee about, and the pains of hell get hold upon thee,” and feeling thyself sinking, as it were, into endless perdition, didst thou cry out in the bitterness of thy soul, “Lord, save, or I perish?” And did he hear and answer? Did he “bring thee up out of the horrible pit, and miry clay, and set thy feet upon a rock, and establish thy goings?” Has he sent “the Spirit of his Son into thy heart, crying, Abba, Father, and bearing witness with thy spirit that thou art a child of God?” And dost thou still “know thou art of God by the Spirit which he hath given” thee?

Once more. Hast thou been brought, as it were, into a new world, a world to which before thou wast, in reality, an utter stranger? Have thine eyes been opened to see those spiritual and eternal things which are revealed by the light of the Gospel? Have thine ears

been instructed to hear the glad tidings of salvation? Hast thou “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” and “felt the powers of the world to come?” I mean, hast thou been made a partaker of the Holy Ghost, and of that faith which is “the evidence of things not seen, and the substance of things hoped for?” Whereas before, thou hadst not experimental acquaintance with, and couldst form no true judgment of spiritual and divine things, art thou now impressed with a deep sense of their importance, and enlightened to understand their nature? Dost thou now consider thyself as surrounded with eternity, encompassed and penetrated with the immensity of God, and on the very brink of an unchangeable state of existence? Art thou deeply affected with spiritual things? Do they daily influence thy temper and conduct? Hast thou a part in the desires, cares, and pursuits of the children of God, and dost thou “sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus,” living a new life, a “life hid with Christ in God?”

If, upon examination, thou findest, thou art not born again, I exhort thee to consider the necessity of the New Birth. O remember it is the one way to holiness on earth and happiness in heaven. Without it thou “canst not enter into the kingdom of God,” canst not enjoy his kingdom of grace, which is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” here, or his kingdom of glory hereafter.—As certainly as a child must be born into the world before it can live in the world, do the business, or enjoy the comforts of life, so certainly must thou be born of God, before thou canst live to God, do the works of God, or enjoy the happiness which flows from communion and fellowship with him.—Do not attempt to excuse thyself by saying, “I

was baptized in my infancy, I have lived a moral, sober, and honest life, I attend God's ordinances, and do many acts of charity." Notwithstanding this, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, (they are the words of Christ,) Except thou be born again, thou canst not enter into," nay, nor "see, the kingdom of God."

Knowest^x thou not that thou must be born of the *Spirit*, as well as of *water*; that the baptism of water is but "the outward and visible sign," and that this will never avail thee without "the inward and spiritual grace," even a "death unto sin, and a New Birth unto righteousness?" Knowest thou not that all thy forms of religion, and modes of worship, thy external regularity of conduct, and splendid services, are lighter than vanity in the sight of God, who searches the heart, and requires to be "worshipped in spirit and in truth?" Knowest thou not that in these respects thou art far surpassed by the Scribes and Pharisees, and yet, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except thy righteousness exceed theirs, thou canst not enter the kingdom of heaven?" Knowest thou not "According to his mercy he saveth us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost?" And God doth know, if thou art not thus saved, thou must be lost for ever. If thou art found destitute of the New Birth at the day of judgment, thou wilt be found altogether filthy and unclean, and so altogether unfit to inhabit the holy city. Thou wilt be excluded those blissful mansions where nothing unholy can enter, and consigned over to the dark abodes of impure and wicked spirits. Then shall thy sad experience prove the truth of the saying that is written, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still!"

O consider this, and say, whether the New Birth is not the one thing needful for thee? What is there under heaven which half so much deserves thy attention and concern? Surely to experience and maintain this great and necessary change, is the grand business of life, in comparison of which every thing else is but a trifle! For “what will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” And his own soul he must lose if he die destitute of the New Birth. O then let all thy other cares be swallowed up in this most important care, and all thy other desires engrossed by this most necessary desire, to be born of the Spirit, born of God!

And that thy labour may not be in vain in the Lord, remember what was advanced under the second head, concerning the way in which this work is wrought. Remember, thy own merit cannot purchase it, nor thy own ability perform it; but it is the free gift of the Father’s love, conferred upon rebellious sinners, through the Redeemer’s mediation, by the operation of the Holy Spirit of grace. Let, then, thine “eyes be unto the hills whence thy help cometh;” let all thy desire, all thy dependance, and all thy expectation, be in, and from, the love of the Father, the merits of the Son, and the influences of the blessed Spirit. Trusting only in him, who bore the chastisement of thy peace, draw near with humble boldness to the throne of divine grace, and plead with the Father’s mercy for the gift of his regenerating Spirit. Be fervent and importunate in prayer, remembering, that thy everlasting all depends upon thy success, and that thou art, whilst unregenerate, continually liable to be hurried hence by death, into the pit of eternal darkness!

“O be not slack in prayer, thy time is wing’d.
See how thy sun declines, ’tis sinking fast,
And dying into darkness; night is near,
The fatal night of death, when thou must sleep
Unactive in the damp and gloomy grave.”

Thy time is short, thy death is certain, and the hour of thy departure uncertain. Perhaps this night thy soul may be demanded of thee. Now, therefore, this hour, this moment, let thy heart say, “Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.”

And while thou art thus wrestling with God in prayer, forget not to use all the other means of his appointment; especially read and hear his word at all opportunities, remembering it is the incorruptible seed, whereby thou must be begotten of God.—With faith and meekness, receive into a loving heart, that ingrafted word which is able to save thy soul. Cordially admit its doctrines, revere its threatenings, embrace its promises. Let it be the matter of thy meditation, and the direction of thy conduct from day to day. Let it dwell in thee richly in all wisdom, for thy own benefit, and that thou mayest be able to admonish others. And, above all, receive by faith, the uncreated, living, and life-giving word, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, to “as many as receive him,” the Father “gives power to become his children,” and regenerates them by his Spirit. *He* is thy Prophet, Priest, and King. Sit at his dear feet, and learn thy heavenly Father’s will. Trust in his all-atoning sacrifice, and accept the pardon he hath purchased for thee. Submit to his sceptre, and let him reign in thy heart in righteousness. “Look to him,” by loving, resigned, and obedient faith, “and be thou saved.” Yes, in this manner thou shalt be saved; thou shalt be made a child of God by this faith, and

the spirit of adoption shall cry in thy heart, "Abba, Father."

I conclude the whole with a word of advice to the children of God, who are born of God by his Spirit.—While *you*, my dear brethren, rejoice in your glorious privileges, forget not to whom you are indebted for them, and be thankful. Join with unfeigned sincerity in the ascription of the Apostle Peter and say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, of his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us." O let your hearts praise him! Let your lives praise him! See that you walk worthy of him whose children you are, that all your tempers, words, and works, be such as become the children of God, and the heirs of heaven! And remember by what means you became, and by what means you continue, his children, even by faith in Christ, from whom you derive into your souls the Holy Spirit, with his various graces. Your faith came by hearing, and your hearing by the word of God. This is the way, walk ye in it.—As new born babes continue to "desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Live by faith in Christ, that "out of his fulness you may receive, and grace for grace." Thus shall ye "grow up into Christ your living head in all things," till you arrive at "the measure of the stature of his fulness," till you are perfect men in Christ Jesus, yea, "young men and fathers" in Christ. Thus shall you "be no longer children tossed to and fro, with every wind" of temptation, but being "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," you shall "overcome the wicked one," and the "word

of God shall abide in you." You shall "abide in him, and he in you," and so shall "you bring forth much fruit." You shall be holy and happy in yourselves, and useful to others, while you bring much honour to God your Saviour. You "shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" and thus "an abundant entrance shall be administered unto you, into the everlasting kingdom of your Lord and Saviour."

CIV.

GOD'S LOVE CHIEFLY MANIFESTED IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON.

JOHN III. 16.

God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

It appears, from the testimony of Scripture, that love to God and man, is the principal and most essential part of religion. (1 Tim. i. 5; Rom. xiii. 10; 1 John iv. 7, 8.) But how shall we attain this love? for it is not in us by nature; but we have naturally a carnal mind. (Rom. viii. 7.) It is the supernatural gift of God, "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." (Rom. v. 5.) Hence it is said, (Deut. xxx. 6,) "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul." But, as we are rational creatures, and God is

a God of reason, it is to be observed, that he works upon our minds by rational means. Thus, to beget in us love to himself, he discovers to us, by the works of creation, the dispensations of Providence, and by his word and Spirit, his own amiable perfections, his most lovely nature and attributes; and to beget in us love to his children, he shows us his image in, and upon them; and to produce in us love to mankind in general, he manifests some traces, at least, of his natural, if not also of his moral image, in all men, and shows us that all men are his creatures, his off-spring, and made of one blood, and, therefore, nearly related to each other.

But is this sufficient? Is it a fact that these discoveries have begotten, and do beget, love to God and mankind in the souls of men? I answer, the fact is otherwise. Notwithstanding these discoveries, which were not wholly unknown to the ancient heathen, mankind did not love God and their neighbour. It was, therefore, needful that God should do more; that he should discover, not only how lovely, but how *loving*, he is to us, and how dear the whole human race is to him, in order that we might love him in return for his love to us, and might set a due value upon our own souls, and those of all men. Now this he hath done, as in many other lower and less striking ways, so, especially, in one grand and unparalleled transaction, in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. He hath "so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved

us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John iv. 9, 10.) Now, when we can't rightly understand, believe, and lay this to heart, we can say with St. John, "We love him because he first loved us;" (1 Epist. iv. 19;) and, loving him, we shall love also his children, and all mankind. Inasmuch, therefore, as this is a subject so important and fruitful, let us reflect upon,

I. THE MATTER OF FACT HERE ASSERTED; OR THE NATURE OF THE GIFT GOD HATH GIVEN.

And here we must consider,—The gift itself:—his "only begotten Son."

He gave not a thing, but a person; not a servant, but a Son. Christ, indeed, is termed a "servant;" (Isai. xlii. 1.) but is properly a "Son," and empties himself in taking the form of a "servant." (Phil. ii. 7.) Being related to his Father as a Son, he is near to him, so near as to be "one" with him; (John x. 30; xiv. 10, 11;) he is dear to him, the Son of his love, his heir. (Heb. i. 2.)—The appellation of *Son*, is applicable to his whole person; even in his human nature he was, in some sense, *the Son of God*, because miraculously begotten; (Luke i. 35;) but more especially in his pre-existing and divine nature. See Rom. i. 3, 4; viii. 3; Gal. iv. 4; Heb. i. 2;* which passages seem to imply that he was the Son of God before his incarnation. And in this light the Chaldee paraphrast, Philo, and Plato, considered the Logos.—Observe further; he is (*μονογενής υἱός*;) the "only begotten Son," having an

* Consult Beza on these Texts.

incommunicable Sonship; he is the Son of God in a sense in which no other being, man or angel, can be so called. (Heb. i. 4.) Others are sons of God by creation, as the angels, (Job xxxviii. 7;) Adam; (Luke iii. 38;) by adoption and regeneration; (John i. 12;) by resurrection from the dead; (Rom. viii. 23; Luke xx. 36;) by title; (Psal. lxxxii. 6;) he is the only begotten Son of God, in a very superior sense, even as a man's own child is his offspring in a sense in which the workmanship of his hands is not his offspring. He is God's very wisdom and word, which was in him from eternity, and issued forth, without abscission or separation, before all things, to be, as one of the ancient Fathers says, "the idea and active power of all material beings;"* that is, to plan and execute, to contrive and produce, the nature and form of each creature.—He is the only begotten Son, by whom all things were made and are upheld. (John i. 3; Col. i. 16; Heb. i. 10.)—All the appearances of God, anciently, were made in, and by him, as appears by three considerations;—The Father never did appear; (John i. 18; 1 Tim. i. 17;)—The same appearance is often represented as

* Athenagorus; to whose words we may add those of Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, in the second century,—“The *Word* whom the Father begat, sending him forth before all things, who was always in God, and became (λογος προφορισκος,) the *Word brought forth*, when he would create the world.”—Justin Martyr says, on the same subject, “Whom he (the Father) made (προπηδᾶν,) to leap from him.” And Clemens Alexandrinus, “He being in him before all ages, (προελθὼν ὁ λόγος δημιουργίας,) the word coming forth which is the cause of the creation, (προγεννηθεὶς δι’ ἧς τα πάντα,) being fore-begotten, by which all things were made.” Similar to which is the language of Tertullian. (See Whitby on Heb. i. 3.)

both God and an angel; (Gen. xviii. 20, 33; xix. 1; Judg. vi. 11—22;)—The passages which speak of God's appearing in the Old Testament, are particularly ascribed to Christ in the New. (Isai. vi. 1; John xii. 41.) &c. — —

In what sense he was given.—To become man; he “tabernacled among us,” (John i. 14,) alluding to his dwelling in the tabernacle and temple of old.—To be poor, mean and afflicted. (Isai. liii. 2.)—That as a Prophet and a Teacher from God he might instruct us in a free and familiar way, as one of ourselves, by his doctrine and example, confirming the blessed truths he taught, by his extreme sufferings and mighty miracles.—That, as the High Priest of our profession, he might offer up the body he had assumed, as a sacrifice for our sins, and might procure for us pardon, and the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.—That passing through death to glory, and being exalted at the right hand of God, as the King of his Church, he might receive us, and confer upon us these blessings; and open to us a prospect beyond the grave.

This is properly termed a gift.—The Lord Jesus did not come by any principles of nature — There was nothing in us to merit such a gift.—There was nothing in us to excite even the least regard in God towards us,—There was no proportion between us and so great a gift,—There was, on the contrary, an infinite disproportion.—Moreover, there was in us an opposition and enmity towards the Donor. — —

II. THE END GOD HAD IN VIEW IN THIS GIFT.

The great end designed was, the salvation of mankind.—That they “might *not* perish” through ignorance of eternal life, and the way to it, being lost, as sheep in a wilderness; through guilt, whereby they had forfeited all right to it, and were under condemnation to eternal death; through depravity, which unfitted them for it, and made them fit fuel for everlasting fire; through weakness, being thereby unable to conquer Satan, the world, the flesh, sin, and death, which all opposed our passage to the promised land; from which causes we were liable to perish in body and soul, now and for ever!—“But *might* have eternal life:” the knowledge of it, and the way to attain it, by divine illumination; a title to it in justification and adoption; a fitness for it in regeneration and sanctification; and, finally, be brought to the possession of it in complete redemption. — —

But for whom is this salvation ordained? For believers in Christ; for those who receive him, with the reverence, affiance, and submission, due to his person and offices; who are convinced that he is the Son of God and the saviour of the world; who are fully persuaded of the certainty and importance of his doctrine, as he is a Prophet; who gratefully depend on his merit, as he is a Priest; and who acknowledge his authority, and actually yield themselves to his sway, as he is a King. — —

Observe the terms employed in the text. “*Who-soever* believeth.”—No believer is excluded, but the blessing is insured to all such characters.—No person is excluded from believing, the most ample informa-

tion being given in the Gospel, and the most indubitable evidence as the ground of faith. —

III. THE CAUSE OF ALL; OR THE LOVE OF GOD,
WHICH IS HEREBY WONDERFULLY MANIFESTED.

The love of God is most conspicuous, in appointing so glorious a person to be given;—one so peculiarly dear to himself;—in giving him to do and suffer such great things;—for persons so unworthy, so guilty, so deserving of condemnation and wrath;—and for such an end that they might not perish, though so deserving to perish;—that they might have eternal life, though liable, justly liable, to eternal death;—that they might escape this misery, and attain this happiness, on the simple and easy condition of believing;—that faith, and salvation by faith, should be free for all.—All this proceeds from, and manifests, *love*,—of compassion, of good-will, and of beneficence, unparalleled and infinite. —

INFERENCES.

Has God loved us?—Then how do we injure him, when we think hardly of him?—How reasonable is it, we should trust him for the salvation he gave his Son to procure?—Much more is it reasonable to trust him for smaller gifts. “He that spared not his own Son, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?” And how reasonable that we should love him in return! “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another, and not only “in word, but in deed, and in truth.” —

How great is the punishment they may expect, who reject this gift!—And the happiness they may look for, who embrace it! — — —

CV.

THE HOLY SPIRIT FIGURED BY LIVING WATER.

JOHN IV. 10.

If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

How much to be admired is the providence, as well as the grace, of God, and how certainly is the former, as well as the latter, employed, in order to promote the salvation of mankind. Instances of this, innumerable, occur in the Scriptures; and we have a remarkable one in the paragraph from which we have taken our text. Christ, in a journey from Judea to Galilee, passed through Samaria, and, being weary, for he was subject to all the innocent infirmities of human nature, he stopped in his way, and sat down by Jacob's well, near to a city called Sychar. Just at that juncture, a woman of Samaria came to draw water, the providence of God so appointing it, that she might have an opportunity of hearing the truth from our Saviour; and, by means of one conversation, Jesus imparted to her that knowledge which the Apostles were long in attaining. With a view to introduce a discourse, which he graciously intended should be the means of her conversion,

he "saith to her, Give me to drink."—"Then saith the woman,—How is it that thou, being a Jew," as appears by thy habit and dialect, "askest drink of me?—for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." The Jews would not borrow or lend, much more ask or accept any favour from the Samaritans. "Jesus answered," showing how superior he was to the ordinary prejudices of his countrymen, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

Consider,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE GIFT HERE MENTIONED, AND REPRESENTED UNDER THE FIGURE OF LIVING WATER.

Jesus Christ, in an especial manner, is the "gift" of God. (John iii. 16; Rom. viii. 32; 2 Cor. ix. 15.)—Though, on this occasion, suffering from natural thirst, he wished for a little water from the well of Samaria, yet he himself is "the fountain of living waters."—He is the chief object of saving knowledge, both as the gift of God, and as the fountain of living water.—An application to him for this water arises from a knowledge of him, in order to which we must receive "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." (Eph. i. 17.) —

But the Holy Spirit is rather intended, which is elsewhere represented under the emblem of fire; (Matt. iii. 11; Isai. iv. 4;) and of air, or wind; (John iii. 8;)—here, under that of water; and in John vii. 37, 38; because he washes and cleanses the soul from the guilt and pollution of sin; (Ezek. xxxvi. 25;) refreshes

the thirsty; (ver. 14, and ch. vii. 37; heals the sick. (Rev. xxii. 1, 17.) He is represented as “*living water*,” as being the only source of life to the dead in sins; and, having quickened, he makes them fruitful in righteousness. (Isai. xxxii. 15—18; xlv. 3, 4; li. 3; Eph. v. 9.)

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As to the necessity of this water.—We are, in ourselves, filthy, and need to be cleansed;—unhappy, and need to be refreshed;—disordered, and need to be healed:—dead, and need to be made alive;—barren, and need to be made fruitful.—

The excellency of this water is manifested from our Lord’s words in the fourteenth verse,—“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him,” will find it so reviving and satisfying to his soul, that he “will never thirst;” he will not want the means of refreshment, be dissatisfied or unhappy; that is, provided he continue to drink thereof. If ever his thirst, or his dissatisfaction and uneasiness, return, it will be the fault of the man, not of the water. But the water, the spirit of faith, love, hope, and joy, of holiness, and happiness, “shall be in him,” an inward living principle. “a well;” (πηγης,) a fountain “of water:” for a well is soon exhausted; “springing,” (αλλομενς,) bubbling up, and flowing on “into everlasting life;” which is a confluence, or an ocean of streams, arising from this fountain. — —

II. WHERE THIS LIVING WATER IS TO BE HAD, BY WHOM, AND ON WHAT TERMS.

It is to be had in Christ.—Not only in the Deity, who is infinitely great, glorious, holy, and just, and, as

such, far distant from us; but in “God manifest in the flesh;” who is our friend, kinsman, and brother.—It is procured for us by his death. (John xvi. 7.)—It is received on our behalf, in consequence of his resurrection and ascension. (Psal. lxviii. 18; Acts ii. 33.)—Hence he waits to bestow the cleansing, refreshing, life-giving water, on those who apply to him; (John vii. 37; Rev. xxi. 6;) and from this consideration, we have great encouragement to ask Christ for it. — —

This living water may be had by all that are poor, and need it; (Isai. xli. 17;) by all who thirst for it; (John vii. 37; Rev. xxi. 6; xxii. 17;) by all who come to Christ. “If *any man* thirst,” said he, “let him come unto me;” and by all who ask, “Thou wouldest have *asked* of me.” — —

Though it was purchased dear by Christ; he gave a great price that he might have a right to impart it to sinners, and that he might render them capable of receiving it, yet we may have it as a free gift, “without money, and without price.” — —

III. THE REASON WHY MEN ARE INDIFFERENT ABOUT IT, AND EITHER APPLY NOT TO CHRIST FOR IT, OR APPLY WITHOUT SUCCESS.

They *know it not*; (John xiv. 17;) neither the nature of the blessing, nor the great value of it, nor the necessity of obtaining it.—

They know not Christ in the dignity of his person,—in his great condescension and love,—in the sufferings he endured that we might have this water,—and as the fountain of it. — —

They do not apply at all; do not confess their need of, nor ask the communication of, spiritual influences.

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Or, if they ask, they do not ask aright, sincerely, earnestly, importunately, perseveringly, believingly, consistently. — —

[APPLY the subject; showing, that ignorance, arising from an aversion to saving knowledge, and the love of sin, is no excuse; (Isai. v. 12, 13; Luke xix. 44;)—the state and danger of those who remain destitute of the sacred influence of the Spirit;—the duty and advantage of immediate and fervent supplication for it. (Prov. i. 22—28, 32.)]

CVI.

THE WORSHIP OF GOD A SPIRITUAL SERVICE.

JOHN IV. 23, 24.

The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

THE first and greatest branch of Christianity is, piety to God; and this consists chiefly in his worship; and in that temper and conduct towards God, to which a right worship of him leads. It is also of as great im-

portance to worship him in a right manner, as to worship him at all.—Our text directs us in this point, in which we have,—

I. AN ACCOUNT OF THE ONLY TRUE WORSHIP.

“The true worshippers worship *the Father, in spirit, and in truth.*”—

The object of worship is “the Father” It is not meant that the Son should be excluded; he is also the object of worship; (John v. 23;) of prayer; (Acts vii. 59, 60; 1 Thess. iii. 11; 2 Thess. ii. 16;) of praise; (1 Tim. i. 12; Rev. v. 13;) of trust; (Isaiah xxviii. 16; Rom. ix. 33; xv. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 4—7;) of love: (1 Cor. xvi. 22;) of obedience; (1 Cor. v. 14, 15;) and this because all the Father hath is his. But the Father was generally addressed by holy men in the Old and New Testament, and is the ultimate object of Christian worship, in whom it must terminate; (1 Pet. i. 21;) whom we must worship through the Son; (Eph. ii. 18; Col. iii. 17; Phil. i. 11; John xiv. 6;) and in the Son. (John xiv. 7—11.) We must worship him—as a Father, being such by creation, preservation, redemption; reconciled to us in Christ, and constituting us his children and his heirs —We must worship him “in spirit and in truth.”—*In Spirit*; i. e., inwardly in our own spirit; without which all outward worship signifies nothing. The Jewish worship was clogged with ceremonies, the meaning of which were not easy to be discerned. The Christian has few ceremonies, and those most obvious in their purport and meaning, as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the Sabbath; the ends of which are easily perceived,—and from hence they derive all

their excellency: if the ends be not answered, the shadows are nothing: so likewise prayer, hearing the word, Christian conversation, all are vain, if they be considered merely an outward work.— — The true worshippers, in using these means, rest not in them, but seek in them the ends for which they are designed.

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More particularly. To worship “in spirit” implies, that we be enlightened by the Spirit of God, in reference to the object of our worship, by a proper acquaintance with his perfections, and the relations in which he stands to us;—that we be quickened by the same Spirit, so as to have within ourselves affections and dispositions suited to those perfections and relations; as adoration and praise, on account of his inconceivable glories; reverence and fear, from a regard to his almighty power; confidence and hope, answerable to his mercy and faithfulness; humility and self-abasement, in a view of his holiness and justice; gratitude and love, from a sense of his unspeakable goodness, and from the relation of a Friend, a Father, and a Husband, in which he stands to us.—This knowledge must be the foundation of all our acts of worship, and these affections must give life to them, or they are a form without power, the lifeless image of worship without reality: nay, without these our worship is a *lie*, implying that God is not that great, good, holy, just, merciful Being that he is, and does not possess the attributes that he does possess. — —

We must also worship God *in truth*—i. e., (in agreement with what has been said,) having a proper acquaintance with him, and suitable affections; for to worship a holy God without self-abasement, a merci-

ful God without trust, a loving God without love, is not to worship him in truth, but in effect to deny him.—*In truth;* in opposition to the shadows of the Mosaic law.—*In truth;* as not resting in the external part of Christian services, but being spiritual worshippers.

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II. THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS WORSHIP.

“The Father *seeketh such* to worship him.”—This worship is well-pleasing to God, as being according to the fitness of things, and the relations really subsisting between God and his intelligent creatures.—This worship is desired by God, not for his own sake, but for ours; we cannot otherwise be happy—Such worshippers are *sought* by God. The Father seeketh them by his Son, his Spirit, his Gospel, his Grace, his Messengers, his Providence. — —

III. THE NECESSITY OF THIS WORSHIP.

“God is a *Spirit*; and they that worship him *must* worship *him* in spirit and in truth.”—On the spirituality of the Divine nature is founded the necessity of spirituality in his worship.—We must worship him in spirit if we would not worship him in vain, nay, be worse for it.—This worship must be given him or none, for other worship is none in reality; it is only a mere pretence; it does not please God, nor glorify him; nor profit our souls, but tends only to make formalists and hypocrites.—

APPLICATION.

You dare not live without worshipping God in some way.—But you may as well not worship him at all, if you do it not in spirit and in truth! Therefore, dare not to worship him otherwise one day longer. “The hour *now* is;”—The stated time, the coming of which was determined of old, even “the accepted time and the day of salvation” is now arrived: that time, when men are to worship God, not in Jerusalem, but, in their hearts, by offering not the sacrifice of beasts, but of themselves.—Become ye, therefore, at this time, and without delay the worshippers which have been described, and give to God the glory due unto his name.

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 CVII.

CHRIST TO BE DISCOVERED IN THE SCRIPTURES AS THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL LIFE, AND WAY TO IT.

JOHN V. 39, 40.

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

How highly criminal were the members of God’s visible church of old, when Christ came to them as to “his own, and his own received him not;” when they

“would not have him,” the true King of Israel, and their rightful and sovereign Lord, “to reign over them;” when they “disallowed and set at nought the stone,” appointed of God to be the foundation of his spiritual temple, and “the head stone of the corner;” when they “denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted to them,” in preference to him, and even proceeded so far as to “kill the Prince of Life!” Nay, how inexcusable were they, in not cordially believing in him, and receiving him as their Saviour and Lord, and in not applying to him for that life and salvation, of which they stood in so much need, and which he alone could bestow! For, surely, God had given them sufficient proof that he was their true and long expected Messiah, “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” the only Saviour of lost sinners. His forerunner, John the Baptist, an evidently holy man, “a burning and a shining light,” one whose mission they did not deny to be of God, and one in whose light, “for a season, they were willing to rejoice;” had repeatedly pointed him out in that character. His own wonderful works had borne witness of him in a manner most convincing to every unprejudiced mind. The Father, by a voice from heaven, had once and again declared him to be his “beloved Son.” And those very Scriptures, which they themselves acknowledged to be of divine inspiration, and in which they were confident they had “eternal life,” clearly testified of him, and held him forth as the great object of faith and love, and the author of salvation.

To these several testimonies our Lord refers in the preceding verses, and on these principles he demon-

strates the guilt and obstinacy of his countrymen; (ver. 31—38;) and in the words of the text, he appeals especially to the evidence arising from Scripture, as, above all others, rendering them inexcusable.

But are we not equally, if not more, inexcusable, if we reject him in principle or practice? Nay, if we do not receive him both in profession and in reality, and become subject to him in heart and life? It is true, we have not been spectators of the holy life, or auditors of the powerful doctrine of the Baptist; we did not stand on the banks of the Jordan, nor were present on the holy mount, when the voice came from “the excellent glory,” saying, “This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Nor have we ourselves been eye-witnesses of his works of wonder, love, and power. But we have ample proof, and, I suppose, in general, do not doubt, that John was sent to be the harbinger of the Messiah, “to prepare his way before him,” and that “his baptism was from heaven, and not of men;” that the Father did speak from heaven with an audible voice, and proclaim Jesus of Nazareth to be his Son; and that Jesus did really perform the mighty acts recorded of him;—that he did say, “I will, be thou clean,” and the leper was cleansed; “Damsel, I say unto thee, arise,” and the damsel arose and walked; “Lazarus, come forth,” and “he that was dead came forth,” as is represented, “bound hand and foot, with grave-clothes.” And, as to the evidence from the sacred Scriptures, we have greatly the advantage of the Jews; we have not only the Old Testament, in good preservation as they had it, but we have the code of the New Testament added to the Old, and in instances almost innumerable, we

may witness the confirmation of the ancient predictions from their accomplishment.

But, alas! what advantage is this to those who are not careful to peruse these Divine Oracles with seriousness and attention? It is much to be deplored that the Holy Scriptures are neglected, and even despised by so many in our day, yea, by those that profess to believe them, and to acknowledge their divine authority. And, it is but too true, that many who do read them, read them to little or no purpose. Hence their infidelity or sin; their ignorance or neglect of the pure and undefiled religion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Permit me to call your attention to this subject, and to show you,

**I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES,
AND THE PROPER WAY OF DOING IT.**

The importance of searching them will appear from three considerations.—They were given by inspiration of God for this very end, that they might be searched, and we are commanded to search them; (Deut. vi. 6—9; iv. 9; Eph. vi. 17; Col. iii. 16; 2 Pet. i. 16—21; 2 Tim. iii. 14—16.)—They are “profitable for doctrine; for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;” (2 Tim. iii. 16;) and are therefore, unspeakably valuable.—They contain the doctrine of eternal life, (including the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body,) and give full, clear, and certain information respecting it, and the way to it.—Hence it appears that it is highly reasonable that we should search the Scriptures, that it is our indispensable duty and great interest. — —

But how may we perform this duty aright? How are we to search the Scriptures?—We must take care that we have a right end in view,—that we search them, not in order to indulge our curiosity by inquiring after extraordinary and marvellous things, of which many are certainly recorded in the Bible; not to find entertainment, as we read a history or a novel, although many most pleasing and entertaining things are contained in them; nor only to gain knowledge and improve our taste in history, philosophy, natural or moral, in poetry or eloquence, although certainly the Scriptures excel in these particulars; and many men of learning have searched them only with this view. But we must search them, that we may receive information in reference to eternal life; and, especially, that we may learn the way to it, the way of salvation from sin and misery, to holiness and happiness, the will of God concerning us, our obligations and privileges. “For in them ye think ye have eternal life.” This is the chief end we should propose, and the attainment of this end is of vast importance. — Therefore we must search them with attention, care, and diligence; hearing, reading, meditating upon them, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and the New Testament with the Old. (Deut. vi. 6; Prov. ii. 1—5.)—With prayer, for “the spirit of wisdom and revelation,” and that before, in, and after reading or hearing them. (Prov. ii. 3—6; 1 Cor. ii. 11; Luke xxiv. 45; Acts xvi. 14; 2 Pet. i. 20.)—With reverence, not as you would read other books, but remembering that you are treading on “holy ground,” (Exod. iii. 5.)—With a humble and teachable spirit; (1 Pet. iii. 2;) like that of Cornelius and his house. (Acts x. 33;)

We must search them not in a prejudiced and a stubborn frame of mind, resolving not to be convinced, or, if convinced, not to yield; (Jer. ii. 23; Is. xlv. 16, 17,) not in a contentious and cavilling spirit; but humbly and simply, submitting our judgment to be informed by the doctrines, our conscience to be enlightened and directed by the precepts, our will to be guided and governed by the laws, our fears to be alarmed by the threatenings, and our hopes to be encouraged by the promises of Scripture. (Isa. lvii. 15; lxxvi. 2; James iii. 17.) This is opposite to the spirit of the Jews. (Luke vii. 30; Acts xiii. 46.)—With a meek and quiet spirit; (James i. 4; Psal. xxv. 8, 9;) as opposed to anger and wrath, whereby men rise against the word; (Jer. vi. 10;) and to an impatient, anxious, and disquieted mind. The Gospel is “glad tidings to the meek.” (Isa. lxi. 1.) And it is of great importance to have a mild, calm, unruffled, and, therefore, susceptible mind in this investigation. Music was often made use of by the ancients, to bring the mind to an undisturbed and peaceful frame.—With faith, believing the certain truth and deep importance of the Gospel. (Heb. iv. 2.)—With love to the word, although it should reprove us of error, or sin, and thereby put us to pain. (2 Thess. ii. 10; Psal. xix. 7—11.)—With a sincere desire, an upright intention, and a fixed resolution to comply with it, to find out and put away every error and every sin, and to do the will of God as far as it is known by us. (James i. 22; John vii. 17.) And how great the importance of this? — —

II. THAT THE RESULT OF THIS SEARCH WILL BE WHAT OUR LORD HERE STATES; A DISCOVERY THAT CHRIST IS THE AUTHOR OF ETERNAL LIFE, AND THE WAY THERETO.

He is the “treasure hid in the field” of the Scripture. “They are they that testify of me.” He is the chief subject of the Law, and the Prophets, and the Psalms, (Luke xxiv. 27, 44,) and especially of the New Testament. In the Scriptures, we find Christ promised and exhibited in types, shadows, and numerous predictions, as to his person, offices, love, sufferings, humiliation, and exaltation. He is represented as given for us, to be incarnate, to suffer, to die, to rise, to intercede; as offering to live in us by his love and Spirit; to receive and raise us to live with him. — —

With respect to eternal life, we find Christ revealing it by his doctrine, procuring it by his merits, imparting it by his Spirit and power, leading us in the way to it by his example, and affording us a pledge and earnest of it in his resurrection and ascension as our forerunner. — —

In another point of view,—As our wisdom, enlightening us, he furnishes us with the knowledge of it, and of the way of attaining it.—As our righteousness, justifying us, he gives us a title to it.—As our sanctification, renewing us, he produces in us a suitableness of character, and a preparation for it.—And, as our redemption, rescuing us from death and hell, he will put us in possession of all its perfection and glory.

III. THE NECESSITY OF COMING TO HIM FOR THIS ETERNAL LIFE, AND OUR GUILT AND INEXCUSABLENESS IF WE DO NOT.

“Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” These words show that we cannot have life without coming to him; and passages innumerable speak the same language. (Matt. xi. 28; John vii. 37; vi. 35, 37, 44, &c.) To come to Christ is to make application to him, by prayer and faith, for the blessings we want. — —

But are we at liberty to come to him? Has not God prevented us by a decree, or are we not prevented by our own inability? And is not one or both of these things implied in our Lord’s words, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.”—“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John vi. 37, 44.) I answer, these expressions, applied to rational agents, do not import any force or constraint.—God says to Israel, (Jer. xxxi. 3,) “With loving-kindness have I drawn thee;” and our Lord, (John xii. 32,) “If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.” And in Hosea, xi. 4, we read that God “drew Israel with the cords of a man, with bands of love.” The former of these expressions means, that the Father, in a peculiar manner, gives to the Son all that hearken to his teaching, and in consequence, see themselves to be in a lost state, guilty, depraved, weak, and wretched, and therefore follow the leading of his Spirit, and come to him by faith. And by the Father’s drawing men to Christ, we may understand his persuading them to believe on

him by the doctrine of his Gospel, and those influences of his grace, which are necessary to give them a right discernment of the evidences of religion, and of the certainty and importance of the great truths of it, and to impress these things deeply on their minds. It is impossible that he who “willeth not the death of a sinner,” should hinder any man from obtaining salvation by any decree he has made; and all that are “taught of God,” (John vi. 45,) which all may be, are drawn by him. — —

But who are they that will not come to him?—Infidels will not, who trust in their own wisdom,—Antinomians, or impenitent sinners, who will not forsake their sins, (John iii. 20,)—The self-righteous,—The formal,—The lukewarm professor,—The backslider,—They will not come, notwithstanding any declarations, invitations, promises, threatenings, delivered by him; notwithstanding the greatness of his love, the depth of his suffering, and his precious death for them. — —

CVIII.

FEEDING ON CHRIST THE ONLY MEAN OF
SPIRITUAL LIFE.

JOHN VI. 53—58.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

THESE words contain a part of one of the most mysterious and spiritual, but, at the same time, most instructive and important discourses which our Lord ever delivered.—It appears that after receiving the distressing intelligence of the murder of John the Baptist, Jesus, from motives of prudence, not of fear, and to teach his disciples, when danger is at hand, to use proper and lawful means of safety, “departed by ship into a desert place,”—“over the sea of Galilee.” (Comp. Matt. xiv. 13, and John vi. 1.) But when the people heard where he was gone, they followed him by land, travelling with such speed, as to arrive at the

place before him, increasing their numbers “out of the cities” through which they passed.—Hence they became “a great multitude:” (ver. 2;) of whom many had already witnessed his miracles, and been healed by him, while others expected cures. Jesus, therefore, “was moved with compassion towards them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd,” so that he not only “healed their sick,” but “taught them many things;” (comp. Mark vi. 34; Matt. xiv. 14;) and “spake unto them of the kingdom of God.” (Luke ix. 11.) Moreover, as by his doctrine he provided for the support of their souls, so “when the day began to wear away,” (Luke ix. 12,) from further compassion, he fed their bodies by a miraculous multiplication of “five barley loaves, and two small fishes.” (Ver. 9—14.) Hence we find he was more eagerly pursued by them, upon his return to Capernaum. (Ver. 24.) Knowing, therefore, that their eagerness to follow and find him, did not arise chiefly from their being convinced that he was their expected Messiah, or from a desire of being instructed and saved by him; but, principally, if not entirely, from a curiosity to see more miracles, and a carnal wish of more bodily food,—Jesus took occasion from hence, to instruct them concerning the duty of seeking from him that spiritual meat, which he had come from heaven, divinely commissioned, to impart to them, but for which they had little or no relish. (Ver. 26, 27.) He then proceeds to speak largely and clearly concerning the nature, necessity, and utility of this immortal food; and he sums up the whole in the words of our text.

Let us consider,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERTSAND BY “EATING THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN, AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD.”

Eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, literally and carnally, as the Jews supposed, (ver. 52,) is not here meant; and this notion Jesus refuted and repelled. (Ver. 63.)—

Nor is the eating his flesh under the form of bread, and drinking his blood under that of wine, intended here, as the Papists suppose; nor the partaking the signs of his flesh and blood, as the Protestants speak, in the holy Eucharist.—For the Lord’s Supper was not then instituted, and however Jesus might have the design of that sacrament in his mind, and make use of terms applicable to it, it is certain his hearers could not understand him as speaking respecting it.—In the case of the converted thief, and all that died in the faith, before the institution of that ordinance, it was not necessary to salvation, but the eating and drinking Christ’s flesh and blood, is here declared to be necessary. (Ver. 53.) —It may be observed, also, that a participation of the Lord’s Supper does not necessarily and universally produce the effects which are ascribed to the feeding on Christ, which is treated of in this discourse. (Ver. 54—58.) —

The eating of Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood, spoken of in the text, is of a spiritual kind, and means a participation in his merits, or an interest in his sufferings and death, in his blood and righteousness, his atonement and mediation, for our justification, sanctification, and spiritual consolation.—This is done by the agency of the Holy Spirit.—And hence it implies that we partake of his Spirit; (ver. 63; 1 Cor. xii. 13; John

iv. 10; vii. 37, 38;) as the fruit of his death and resurrection, viz. to quicken, renew, (Tit. iii. 5—7,) strengthen, and comfort us. — — His Word also is implied; (ver. 65;) confirmed by his death, being the means of feeding us with knowledge, of refreshing, supporting, and nourishing our minds. The doctrines of the Word are often represented under this metaphor. (Prov. ix. 5; Isai. lv. 2; Eccles. xxiv. 21) Now we are thus to partake of Christ by faith; by which we are persuaded of the sufficiency of his merits, and rely thereon for justification; persuaded of the efficacy of his Spirit, and apply for it, in order to regeneration, and renewal in righteousness; convinced and assured of the truth and importance of his Word, and yield a due attention to it, maturely considering and inwardly digesting it.*

II. THE NECESSITY OF THIS, AND THE ADVANTAGES THAT RESULT FROM IT.

Without feeding thus on Christ, we “have no life in us;” (ver. 53;) we may have natural and animal life, vital heat, and motion; we may breathe, and speak, and use our bodily senses; we may have rational life, may apprehend, reason, judge, choose, and so forth. But we have not spiritual life; the favour of God, (Psal. xxx. 5,) union with him, (Eph. iv. 18,) a spiritual mind, (Rom. viii. 6,) spiritual warmth, or zeal breathing in prayer and praise, spiritual senses, a discerning and understanding mind, a vigorous choice, just judgment, and lively affections towards God. We have not eternal

* As Tertullian says, *Auditu devorandus, ruminandus intellectu, et fide, digerendus*. It must be “devoured by the ear, ruminated upon by the understanding, digested by faith,”

life, no title to it, no meetness for it, nor earnest of it. (1 John v. 11, 12.) — —

If we do eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood, we have eternal life; (ver. 54;) a title to it in our justification; a fitness for it in our progressive sanctification; an earnest, or the beginning of it, in communion with God. — —

This is proved by the following verses. His, "flesh is meat indeed;" or is truly meat, and the most excellent meat; and his "blood is drink indeed." (Ver. 55.) Hereby we are refreshed, as with meat and drink; strengthened for our spiritual warfare, duty, and suffering, and nourished up to eternal life.—Hereby we have union with Christ, and a continuance thereof; (ver. 56.) we have the present life of grace; (ver. 57;) and shall have the future life of glory. (Ver. 58.)

III. HOW WE MAY THUS EAT THE FLESH AND DRINK THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, AND THE STEPS TO BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO IT.

We must prefer this spiritual meat before the bodily "meat which perisheth," (ver. 7,) and all earthly things.—We must expect it from Christ, as a *free gift*, (ver. 27, 31—34,) and must have no reliance on our own merit.—We must "come to him" for it, (ver. 34—37,) by prayer, in faith, being persuaded he will give it, and depending entirely on his power, love, and faithfulness.—We must, therefore, be "taught of God," by his Word, Spirit, and Providence; (ver. 45;) receiving thereby illumination, conviction, discipline.—We must be "drawn" by the Father. (Ver. 43, 44.) An attention to the great principles of natural religion, and obe-

dience to its dictates, is a preparation for Christianity. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." (John vii. 17.) — — The miracles of God, the promises of God, the dispensations of Providence, especially afflictive ones, the influences of the Spirit, are given, and free for all. Thus he draws, "first by the iron chains of legal convictions, and secondly by the silken cords of redeeming love"* Instances of the former method we have in the Jailor, (Acts xvi. 30,) in David, (Psal. xxxii. 4,) in the Jews, (Acts ii. 37,) in Saul, (Acts ix. 5,) in the Woman of Canaan, (Matt. xv. 22—28;) and of the latter in the Woman of Samaria, (John iv. 7—26,) in Zaccheus, (Luke xix. 2—10,) in the Disciples,—in Lydia. (Acts xvi. 14.) Without this drawing, no man can or will come to Christ, whether he be moral or immoral, Jew or nominal Christian, learned or unlearned, young or old. For, naturally, he neither feels nor sees his need of coming to Jesus; he has neither power nor will to come, being chained down by ignorance, pride, and self-conceit, by sloth, by unbelief, and hardness of heart.—This is a true, but humbling doctrine: and that the Father is "not willing any should perish," but is ready to draw all to Christ, is most encouraging. — —

APPLICATION.

Have you eaten the flesh and drunk the blood of Jesus Christ? Examine yourselves particularly. — — If you have not, your state is wretched and dangerous; and you have need to come without delay; and, therefore, to be drawn by the Father.—Be willing, be desi-

* Fletcher.

rous to be drawn, or to hear him say, "Depart, ye cursed;" pray that he would draw you; yield to his attraction, "hear and learn of the Father;" hear the voice of his works, his Providence, his Word, his promises, his threatenings; hear the still small voice of his Spirit, and follow his direction.—Are you mourning for him; hungering for the bread of life, that "you may eat thereof, and not die?" (Ver. 50.)—Then, he is drawing you; be encouraged and thankful.—Have you come to him, and partaken of his flesh and blood? Then, again, be thankful, and continue to feed on him, and use the strength you have received to his glory.

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CIX.

CHRIST PROMISES HIS SPIRIT TO THOSE WHO THIRST AND COME TO HIM.

JOHN VII. 37, 38.

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

It will be readily allowed, that every thing uttered by Christ, who was the wisdom of God incarnate, and by whose word we shall be judged at the last day, is deserving our serious regard. But some of his words seem to demand more particular attention, as they were addressed to large concourses of people, and on

solemn occasions. Such are those now read in your hearing. The feast, here referred to, was that of tabernacles, instituted in commemoration of the Children of Israel dwelling in tents in their passage through the wilderness. It continued eight days, the first and last of which were the most solemn. And, "in the last day, that great day of the feast," there was an holy convocation of the people, attended with some extraordinary sacrifices. This day was called the "great day of the feast," because of the esteem in which they held it; on the seven preceding days sacrifices were offered, not for themselves in particular, but for the whole world; but the sacrifices of this day were offered for Israel alone, on whose behalf only several solemnities were then observed. The Jews used on this day to march round the altar seven times, singing hosannas with palm-branches in their hands, in memory of the Israelites, in the days of Joshua, marching round Jericho seven times on the day of its fall. On this day, also, they drew water from the fountain or brook of Siloam, at the foot of Mount Zion, and carried it to the priests in the temple, with the sound of the trumpet, and great rejoicing, where they poured out part of it, mingled with wine, as a drink-offering. This was accompanied with prayers to God for rain to fall at the following seed-time, the people in the mean time singing, "With joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation." (Isai. xii. 3.) Part of the water they drank in commemoration of the miraculous supply of water given in the wilderness, when their fathers were ready to die with thirst.—It is probable, this ceremony was originally intended to be emblematical of their desire and expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and of the,

effusion of the Holy Spirit under his dispensation. But the Jews had miserably perverted it; and hence Christ wished, perhaps, to lead them back to the original design and meaning of the institution, and to draw their minds from the consideration of merely terrestrial water, and all earthly and temporal things, to the water of life, and to himself, the chief scope and end of this feast, and of all the ceremonies of their law.* For Jesus stood, probably, on some eminence, where he could be well seen and heard by the surrounding multitude, as the priest did, who poured out the water above-mentioned, and cried with a loud voice, that he might excite the greater attention, "If any man thirst, &c."

Let us consider,

I. THE NATURE, NECESSITY, AND EXCELLENCY OF THE BLESSING SPOKEN OF IN THE TEXT, AND REPRESENTED UNDER THE EMBLEM OF "LIVING WATER."

It appears that the Spirit of God is the blessing here intended; for of this St. John interprets Christ's words. (Ver. 39.) By the *Spirit* in Scripture, we are frequently to understand that divine Agent, in whose name, as well as in that of the Father and the Son, we are baptized; (Matt. xxviii. 19;) who, although in nature he is one with, is yet distinguished in person and operation from the Father and the Son. (1 Cor. xii. 4—6; Eph. iv. 4—6; 1 John v. 6—8.) This divine agent is often termed the Holy Spirit, the Eternal Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, of Wisdom, and Revelation, of Life, of Grace, of Adoption, of Might, of Holiness, the Comforter, or Paraclete, the Spirit of God and of Christ.—

* See Tremillius and Lightfoot.

But his gracious influences, or operations, are chiefly here meant. Not, indeed, those of an extraordinary nature, whereby the apostles and many of the first Christians were to be enabled to work miracles, to speak in divers languages, and foretell events; these were, in no age, necessary to, nor certain proofs of, being in a state of favour or acceptance with God. (Matt. vii. 22; 1 Cor. xiii. 1.) But those of an ordinary nature are intended—As a Spirit of *illumination* to open the eyes of our understanding, that we may discern and judge aright of divine things, which we are unable otherwise to know. (Eph. i. 17, 18; 1 Cor. ii. 9—15)—As a Spirit of *truth*, preserving us from all dangerous and destructive error, concerning ourselves, the nature and will of God, concerning Christ, and the way of salvation through him, and guiding us into all truth. (John xiv. 17. xvi. 13; 1 John ii. 20, 21.)—Of *wisdom*, removing the folly natural to us, and making us “wise unto salvation;” (Tit. iii. 3;) and directing and leading us in every important step we have to take. (Rom. viii. 14; Prov. v. 6.)—Of *life*, Rom. viii. 2.) quickening us; (Eph. ii. 1, 5, 6; 1 Cor. xv. 45; John xiv. 19;) begetting in our hearts a sense of spiritual and eternal things, producing conviction, humiliation, sorrow of a godly sort, repentance unto life, and living faith; (Col. ii. 12, 13;) and hereafter uniting our souls to God and Christ. Thus we obtain life answerable to our light; and dispositions, and affections, suitable to our knowledge.—Of *grace*, converting, regenerating; renewing the will, affections, tempers, and dispositions. (John iii. 5, 6; Tit. iii. 5.) The necessity of this is founded on our fall. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” And the result of it is

a real, great and manifest change. (2 Cor. v. 17.)—Of *adoption*, assuring us of our justification, and privilege of being the sons of God, which we cannot otherwise know. (Gal. iv. 4; Rom viii. 15, 16.) Hereby we have peace of mind, a hope of immortality and glory. (Rom. v. 1, 2.)—Of *power* and might, inspiring our minds with fortitude and strength, (Eph. iii. 16,) both for our spiritual warfare, (Eph. vi. 10,) and for the discharge of our duty, that we may “love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves,” that we may love our enemies, may “mortify the deeds of the body,” (Rom. viii. 13,) and fulfil all other duties; and for suffering with Christ; (Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12;) we should otherwise faint in the day of adversity. (2 Tim. ii. 1; 2 Cor. xii. 9.)—Of *holiness*, or sanctification; (1 Pet. i. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13;) carrying on and completing the change begun in our regeneration, and inspiring us with all the graces of the Christian character. (Eph. v. 9; Gal. v. 22.)—Of *comfort*; (John xiv. 16;) suggesting ideas, and communicating discoveries and sentiments, which refresh, satisfy, and sustain the wearied mind, as water, milk, or wine, the fainting body (Isai. lv. 1, 2.) Hence it is called “living water,” not so much because it washes and cleanses the soul, like water the body, as because it imparts a sensible refreshment, suited to the immortal spirit, satisfies its desires, fills its capacity, abides with it, and is to it a pledge and earnest of life eternal. — —

The necessity of these influences might be made to appear in all the particulars that have been named.— But it is as excellent as necessary.—It is evidently perfective of our rational and immortal nature, and of all our faculties.—It makes us objects of divine compla-

ency. God can only delight in that conformity to himself, which is produced by his Spirit.—It fits us for glorifying and bringing much honour to him, by being unblameable, useful, holy, and like himself.—It enables us to withstand the most subtle and powerful temptations, with which we can be beset, being “strong in the Lord,” (Eph. vi. 10,) and “in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. ii. 1.)—It fits us for holding, and enables us to maintain daily and intimate communion with God.—It establishes our souls in the truest peace and pleasure. (Acts ix. 31.) We “have meat to eat which the world knows not of,” and can enjoy God “though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive should fail, and the field shall yield no meat.” (Hab. iii. 17.)—It is heaven begun on earth. (Eph. i. 14.)—If it be compared with the riches, honours, and sensual delights of this world, and with the highest attainments in human learning and knowledge, it will be found superior to them all. — —

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS INVITED TO PARTAKE OF THIS BLESSING.

They thirst—“If any man thirst.”

They are such as are sensible of their want of this blessing, or of a greater degree of it; as the thirsty are of their need of drink. And it is necessary these should feel this sense of want, for no step can be taken without it.—They sincerely desire it, as the thirsty desire drink, from a conviction of its absolute necessity and great excellency — — — Their desire is fervent; thirst or hunger being the strongest of all our appetites. And

it is requisite their desire should be fervent, in some measure corresponding to the worth of the blessing.—It is constant; as thirst continues till we drink.—It increases more and more, as thirst does, the longer the time of refreshment is delayed.—It is restless; the thirsty person cannot rest without a draught, nor the hungry without food.—It is an active desire; it will induce all who have it, to avoid and forsake whatever will prevent or hinder their obtaining the object sought; as all sin in temper, word, and work, both of commission or omission, the inordinate love of the world, and of every creature; to attend the ordinances of God, which are the channels of this grace; to comply with the will of God, as far as it is understood and known.

All such are invited without exception, notwithstanding former sinfulness and guilt, present unworthiness depravity, or ignorance, or future weakness and insufficiency for any thing good of themselves. “If *any* man thirst, let him come unto me.”

But consider,

III. WHAT IS THE PURPORT OF THE INVITATION, OR THE DIRECTION, GIVEN THEM?

“Let him come unto me,” says Christ. This implies that the blessing is in the hands of Christ, and that he can bestow it. Considered in his divine nature, as “the Word that was in the beginning with God and was God,” the spirit proceeds from him as well as from the Father, and he has it to bestow.—Considered in his whole person; it has been procured by him, and is the fruit of his death and intercession; (Psal. lxxviii. 18; Gal. iii. 13, 14; Acts ii. 33—38;) hav-

ing been received by him for us; by him who is related to us, as our friend, brother, husband. What consolation does this afford! — —

Nor is there a doubt that he is as willing as he is able to bestow it. “Let him come to me.” Would he speak thus, if he did not intend to impart what we came to him for?—He is the faithful and true Witness, and he hath *promised* this blessing. It is the peculiar promise of the Father. (Acts i. 4; Joel ii. 28; Isai. lix. 20, 21; Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27; Jer. xxxi. 33; Luke xi. 13.) Thus also it is the promise of the Son. (Luke xxiv. 49; John xiv. 15, 16; xv. 26; xvi. 7; and especially the text.)—He hath already done more. He hath given himself, (Gal. ii. 20; Tit. ii. 14,) his divinity to be incarnated; his humanity, even “his soul an offering for sin,” and his body to ignominy and torture for our sakes.—And will he deny us that Spirit, which, being denied, would render all he has suffered for us in vain?—He has actually conferred it on thousands and myriads of our fellow-sinners. — —

But we must come to him for it. But how can we, who are on earth, come to him “whom the heavens have received till the time of the restitution of all things?” Had we lived in the days of his flesh, we might have come to him, but how can we approach him now?—“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. xviii. 20.) We must, therefore, assemble with his people.—He is always with, and in his people; (Matt. xxviii. 20; Isai. xii. 6; Psal. lxvi. 5; Eph. ii. 19—22; Col. i. 27;) we must, therefore, join with his people, and be in fellowship with them.—He is in and with his Word, and works by it; we must, consequently, hear, read, and receive

it in faith, and with affection. Thus we come to him as a Teacher or Prophet.—But he himself teaches us, by his Spirit, and “he is not far from any one of us. In him we live, and move, and have our being.” He is nigh unto us in “all we call upon him for” (Deut. iv. 7.) He stands at the door and knocks;” (Rev. iii. 20;) we must, therefore, apply to him in prayer. “Thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” (John iv. 10.)—We must exercise faith in his sacrifice and intercession, or mediation, relying thereon; (Gal. iii. 2, 14;) and in his power, love, and faithfulness. This is what is chiefly intended by coming to him. “He that believeth in me.”—And it is necessary.—(James i. 6, 7; Mark xi. 22, 25.) Thus we come to him as a Mediator;—We must, at the same time, be subject to him as a Governor. —

We must “come to him and *drink*,” must apprehend, appropriate to ourselves, and receive the promised blessing. — Or it may be understood thus,—we *shall drink*. For,

IV THE PROMISE SHALL BE FULFILLED,

And is, “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” This implies, that the Holy Spirit shall be given to be not only *with us*, but *in us*. (John iv. 14; xiv. 16, 17, 20.)—That he shall be in us in copious and plentiful communications, as “*a river*.” (Isai. xli. 18; xlv. 3.)—In all his variety of operations, gifts, and graces—“*Rivers*,”—to abide in and with us; not as pools, but rivers and living waters—*a well, a fountain*. (John iv. 14; xiv. 23.)—And to flow from us in order to water others.

CX.

HOW THE WORK, WE HAVE TO DO IN LIFE,
MAY BE SUCCESSFULLY FULFILLED.

JOHN IX. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

As Jesus and his disciples were passing through the streets of Jerusalem, they met a man, who was known to have been blind from his birth; on observing whom, the disciples asked their Lord, Whether he or his parents had sinned, to have occasioned his being born blind. The question was founded on an absurd opinion, which many of the Jews had imbibed from the heathen, —that the condition of men in this world is better or worse, according to their conduct in some pre-existent state. Jesus replied, That neither that man, nor his parents, had sinned, to cause his want of sight, but that the dispensation was intended to “manifest the works of God,” or his miraculous power, in conferring upon him the faculty of sight, by the hands of Jesus. Then our Lord took occasion to make the observation of the text. It was necessary for him to do the works his Father sent him into the world to perform, however he might irritate the malice of the Jews thereby. A day was appointed to him. His mediatorial work was to be accomplished within the limits of time; he must instruct mankind by his doctrine; direct them by his example; and make atonement for sin, during his abode

in this world. And it was now proper he should open the eyes of this blind man, as an emblem of his enlightening the souls of men by the truth. — — Man also has his *day*, (Job xiv. 5, 6,) a limited period, during which to fulfil the work appointed him. Consider,

I. THE WORK WE HAVE TO DO DURING THE DAY OF LIFE.

Our work, in general, is to insure our everlasting salvation; to regain the knowledge, favour, image, and fellowship of God.—These things are absolutely necessary, that we may attain true and substantial happiness, especially the happiness of the future state, that we may have a title to it, a qualification and meetness for it, a foretaste and earnest of it.—This, our general work, must be done during the day of life. Activity and diligence are requisite to improve our opportunities, to gain, and to do good. Death will soon arrive, when, the time of our probation being finished, “every one shall receive the things done in his body;” and “a rest (shall) remain for the people of God.” — —

As the day is divided into twelve hours, so life is distributed into different ages; childhood, youth, manhood middle age, declining years, old age. Each period requires from us different duties, or kinds of work.—There are in life, also, different states and conditions, a single, a married state; that of children, parents, servants, masters; the condition of poverty or wealth, of dependence or power. And from these too arise various duties.—There are also different advantages, opportunities, and means for acquiring knowledge and grace;

and becoming holy and useful, occasioning increased obligations. — —

II. HOW WE MAY PROSECUTE THIS WORK WITH SAFETY AND SUCCESS.

We must have the light of day.—The light of life, as above remarked, in opposition to the darkness of death. This work cannot be done in the grave, nor in eternity. “The night” of death, “cometh, when no man can work.”—The light of truth, in opposition to the darkness of error. This is discovered to us by the word, providence, and Spirit of God, showing us our rule, which is the divine will; our end, which is the divine glory; our pattern and guide, namely the example of Christ and his Apostles.—The light of knowledge, in opposition to the darkness of ignorance; we must seek an acquaintance with that word, with the dispensations of Providence, and the illumination of the Spirit.—The light of faith in that truth, thus made known, in opposition to the darkness of unbelief.—The light of wisdom, actually and uniformly endeavouring to walk by that rule, and steadily aiming at that end. — —

Guided and acting according to this light, we shall not stumble at any doctrine, however extraordinary, we are called to believe,—at any duty, however difficult, we are called to perform,—at any privilege, however great, we are called to enjoy,—at any suffering, we are called to undergo. We shall neither fall into destructive error, nor into wilful sin, nor into real misery. We shall be safe from our enemies, and all the dangers that may await us till our work is done,—

secure in death, and finally possess the promised reward. — —

III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF OUR NOT TAKING THE WAY PRESCRIBED.

They that do not attend to this, but walk in the night,—that put off the work of the day, till the night of death;—that do not take with them the light or lamp of truth, but the ignis fatuus or false light of fancy, their carnal reason, the opinions, customs, or habits of others;—that do not take the light of knowledge, but are content to be ignorant of the great truths God has revealed, and of the end he calls them to pursue;—the light of faith in those truths, but remain in the darkness of unbelief;—the light of wisdom, neither walking by his rule, nor regarding his end;—they stumble at the doctrines, duties, sufferings;—neglect and despise the privileges;—have no safety;—no substantial peace;—and must fall at length into perdition. — —

CXI.

WE MUST BE WASHED BY CHRIST TO HAVE
A PART WITH HIM.

JOHN XIII. 8.

If I wash thee not thou hast no part with me.

How important and instructive were all the actions, as well as the discourses, of the Son of God; not excepting those which, to a superficial observer, may ap-

pear trivial. They all convey instruction in matters of infinite moment, as well as carry conviction to our minds, with respect to his divine mission and character. His tarrying behind his parents at Jerusalem, and remaining in the temple when they sought him sorrowing, shows us that our heavenly Father's business must be preferred even before the duty which we owe to our parents. His submitting to be baptized, though he had no sin to be washed away, shows the importance of fulfilling all righteousness, and not neglecting any ordinance or appointment of God.—His putting his hands on little children, taking them up in his arms, and blessing them, shows us the gracious regard of God to them, and how readily he receives them. His opening the blind eyes, his unstopping the deaf ears, and loosing the tongue of the dumb, manifest that similar miracles must be done for our souls. His cleansing the lepers, and raising the dead, signify, that as our souls are defiled, and dead in sin, they must be quickened and cleansed by his Spirit. His feeding multitudes, also, with a few barley loaves and small fishes; his calming the winds and the waves; his cleansing the temple; his cursing the barren fig-tree; were all of them significant of corresponding acts of power, put forth in reference to the souls of men.

No action of our Lord, perhaps, is apparently more trivial, than his washing his disciples' feet; and yet this is adapted to yield us much instruction. It teaches us an important lesson of humility, condescension, and love, one to another; and it instructs us, by way of figure, or emblem, concerning that salvation from the pollution of sin, without which we can have no part with Christ.—

The transaction took place at the last Pascal Supper, which Jesus celebrated with his disciples. On this occasion it is said, "Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God:"—conscious of his own dignity, as having existed in heaven before he appeared on earth, and as being about to return thither to reign, in union with his Father, over all things; yet, to give his disciples and his followers, in all future ages, an example of the readiness wherewith they should do offices of mutual love, and to exhibit, emblematically, the effects of his grace on our minds; "he riseth from supper," probably, what was called the *antepast*, which preceded the eating of the pascal lamb, "and laid aside his" upper "garments, and took a towel and girded himself" "After that, he poured water into a basin," or a large vessel, usually kept for the purpose of washing, wherever the Jews supped, "and began to wash the disciples' feet."—Then cometh he to Simon Peter," after washing the feet of those who sat nearest to him, "and Peter said, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?"—Thou, who art the Son of God, wash the feet of thy disciple, a poor fisherman, and an unworthy sinner! "Jesus said, What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter;" thou dost not now understand the intention of this act, but thou shalt know it hereafter. "Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet," to which rash assertion, Jesus replied, in the words of our text, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me;" and by his answer he caused him, not only to retract his former refusal, but to express a hearty desire that Christ should wash his whole person,—

entering, perhaps, at this moment, into the mystical meaning of the action.—

Let us consider,

I. IN WHAT RESPECTS IT IS POSSIBLE WE MAY HAVE A PART WITH CHRIST.

We may have a part with him in the following respects:—In the peculiar favour and love of the Father. Christ is to be considered here *as man*, and, as such, he is the “elect of God, in whom his soul delighteth,”—his “beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased.” (Isai. xlii. 1; Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5; 2 Pet. i. 17.) And we may obtain similar love and approbation. (Rom. v. 1, 2; Eph. i. 6; Isai. xlii. 3—5; Zeph. iii. 17)—In being of the same family as God’s children. He is the Son of God in a most peculiar sense; but we may be his sons and daughters, at least, by adoption. (John i. 12; 2 Cor. vi. 18; Gal. iv. 5.)—In God’s peculiar protection and care. The ninety-first Psalm was applied, and justly applied, by Satan to Christ, (Matt. iv. 6,) and is also applicable to all the true children of God. (1 Pet. iii. 12, 13.) They “dwell on high, their place of defence is the munition of rocks; bread shall be given them; their water shall be sure.” (Isai. xxxiii. 16.) The Lord will be to his Church, “a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.” (Zech. ii. 5.)—In the image and likeness of God. Christ is the most perfect and complete image of God; (2 Cor. iv. 4; Col. i. 15; Heb. i. 3; (but we, in resemblance of him, may be images of God. (1 Cor. xi. 7; Eph. iv. 22—24; Col. iii. 10.)—What a great excellency and glory is this!—In communion and fellowship with God. Jesus had most intimate

fellowship with his Father; (John xiv. 9—11;) but we may certainly participate with him in this blessed communion. (John xvii. 21—23; xiv. 15—23; 2 Cor. vi. 16; Eph. ii. 21, 22; iii. 17; 1 John i. 3.)—In a title to the eternal inheritance. Christ is the ‘heir of all things;’ (Heb. i. 2;) and we may be ‘joint heirs with him.’ (Rom. viii. 17.)—In paradise. (2 Cor. xii. 4; Luke xxiii. 43; Phil. i. 21; 2 Cor. v. 1; John xiv. 3; xvii. 24.)—In a glorious resurrection. (Rom. viii. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 42—44, 49; Phil. iii. 20, 21.)—In being assessors with him in judgment. (Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 29, 30; 1 Cor. vi. 2.)—In his joy and felicity in eternity. (Matt. xxv. 21; Rev. xxi. 3—6.)—In his honour and glory. (Luke xxii. 29; Rev. ii. 10; iii. 12, 21.)—Finally, in all his unsearchable riches. (Rev. xxi. 7.)—How different this from having a ‘part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.’ (Rev. xxi. 8.) — —

II IN WHAT SENSE IT IS NECESSARY WE SHOULD BE WASHED, IN ORDER TO OUR HAVING A PART WITH CHRIST.

The following verses, especially the tenth, show, that our Lord is not to be understood in the text, as speaking literally, of the washing of the body, but figuratively, of the washing of the soul from sin. See Acts xxii. 16; Rev. i. 5. This is explained in 1 Cor. vi. 11, as including the benefits of justification and sanctification.

The first grand impediment to our having a part with Christ, as above described, is, our past sins, in consequence of which we are involved in guilt, condemnation, and wrath. And since all have sinned, (Rom. iii. 10—19; Gal. iii. 22,) all are, therefore, in a state of condemnation and wrath, liable to eternal misery. (Rev.

xxi. 8.) From this we are freed, when we are washed from our past sins, and obtain justification; (Rom. iii. 24—26; the consequence of which is, peace with God, the divine favour, and all the other blessings above mentioned —The second grand hinderance is, the depravity of our nature; a depravity extending to every faculty and power, and discovering itself before God, in the evil of all our thoughts, desires, intentions, and works. (Gen. viii. 21; Jer. xvii. 9.) It renders us unlike God, and hostile to him, and, therefore, wholly unfit to enjoy communion with him here and hereafter. From this we are washed, when we are regenerated and sanctified; (Tit. iii. 5—7; ii. 14; 2 Thess. ii. 13;) and our spiritual renewal must extend to all our powers: our *head*, our intellectual; our *heart*, our moral; our *hands*, our executive powers; must be all washed. 1 Thess. v. 23.)—There is yet another hinderance to the possession of a part with Christ; *viz.* our daily failings and faults. One that has bathed and washed his whole body, will contract some defilement on his feet by walking even a few steps from the bath. So those who have been washed from their sins, by justification and regeneration, need to be further cleansed by a daily and hourly pardon. (Ver. 10.) —

All need these things to be done for them; nor will Christian knowledge, or orthodoxy, or a form of godliness, or an unblameable conduct, or deeds of charity; stand instead of this washing, or benefit any man who stops short of it. — —

III. FROM WHOM, AND IN WHAT WAY, WE MAY BE THUS WASHED.

This benefit is obtained from the Lord Jesus, and from him only. The text, and many other Scriptures, are plain on this point, but the blindness of the natural heart leads to many objections.—Will not our reformation, and amendment, and good works, do, to save us from our past sins, according to the words of the Prophet? (Isai. i. 16.) No. Without shedding of blood there can be no remission; and no blood can avail but that of Christ. (Heb. ix. 9; x. 4.) Through this alone can we have redemption, (Eph. i. 7,) reconciliation, and justification. (Rom. v. 6—11.) In Christ Jesus has there been a “fountain opened, for sin and for uncleanness.” (Zech. xiii. 1.)—Again, it may be said, Will not our denying ourselves, and mortifying sin, according to Rom. viii. 13, and Gal. v. 24, sanctify us, and heal our depravity of nature? No. The Holy Ghost can alone effectually cleanse us. (2 Thess. ii. 13; 1 Pet. i. 2; Tit. iii. 5, 6; Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27; 2 Cor. vi. 16; vii. 1.) And his influences are treasured up in Christ as their source, to whom, therefore, we must go to be cleansed from all impurity; using every means appointed for that end, in dependence on him.—But will not our watchfulness and care preserve our feet, when once cleansed, and keep us free from all failings, &c. according to Rev. xvi. 15? No; we shall still fall short of the glory of God, and need a fresh application of the blood of Christ, and fresh communications of his Spirit. —

Observe then, —Christ washes us, as a Priest, from our past sins, by his blood. (1 John i. 7.)—As a King, by communicating to us the influences of his Spirit;

(Ezek. xxxvi. 25;)—As a Prophet, by his Word. (Eph. v. 26; John xv. 3; xvii. 17.) This last, *viz.* the Word, shows us on what terms we are cleansed, and is the vehicle of pardon, and the Holy Spirit.—On our part there must be faith in his blood; (Rom. iii. 24;)—prayer for the Spirit; (Luke xi. 13;)—consideration of the Word, and application of it to ourselves. — —

INFERENCES.

How great the honour and advantages of the real Christian!—How indispensable thereto, the justifying and sanctifying grace of Christ!—What can they say in excuse at the last day, who, knowing that Christ has provided a “fountain for sin and uncleanness,” nevertheless remain in their sins, and thus render themselves incapable, for ever, of a part with Christ!—How deluded are such as imagine they have an interest in him, while their conversation and life show that they are yet unwashed.

CXII.

GOD IS TO BE SEEN IN CHRIST.

JOHN XIV. 8, 9.

Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

THE knowledge of God is, of all subjects which can come under our consideration, the most important. It is not only the first, and most essential particular included in true religion, but it is the root of every other. Every branch of genuine Christianity springs from it, and no branch can exist without it. It is the one source of the true and spiritual worship of God, and of all acceptable service which can be rendered to him. It is impossible to worship or serve him aright whom we do not rightly know; and it is scarcely possible not to worship and serve him, if indeed we do know him. How can we but reverence and fear, adore and magnify, a Being whom we know to be so great and glorious? And how can we do otherwise, than praise and love, obey and serve, one, who is so good and gracious, and one, to whom we see ourselves to be under such infinite obligations?

Hence we are not surprised that great stress is laid upon this point in the oracles of God, or that holy men of old highly valued, and earnestly sought, this know-

ledge. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding," says Solomon. (Prov. ix. 10.) "Acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee;" is an exhortation in one of the most ancient of inspired books (Job. xxii. 21.) And most true is the promise by which it is enforced, for, as our Church observes, in agreement with the words of our Lord, In the knowledge of God, "standeth our eternal life." On the other hand, to live and die without it is eternal death. For when the Lord Jesus is "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire," he will "take vengeance on them that know not God." (2 Thess. i. 7—9.)—No wonder, then, that Moses, at a time when he had the nearest access to God, when he conversed with his Maker face to face, and might have asked whatever he would, under a certainty of obtaining his request, should fix on this in preference to every other thing, and repeatedly and fervently pray, "Lord, I beseech thee, show me thy glory!" And no wonder that Philip, at a time when he enjoyed similar intercourse and familiarity, not indeed with Deity invisible, but with Deity manifested in the flesh, should make a similar request to him, whose grand business on earth was to "declare" the Father. "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

But inquire we,

I. WHAT WAS THE MEANING AND PURPORT OF PHILIP'S REQUEST.

Some have supposed that Philip desired to see the Father in some visible shape. But surely the Apostles,

who were familiarly acquainted with the Old Testament, and had faith in the doctrine of it, were better instructed than to suppose the Father to be visible.—Nor does it appear that he wished to see any similitude of God, considering how much is said against every thing of the kind in the books of Moses, and how strongly the people were exhorted to remember that when the glory of God appeared, at the giving of the law, they “saw no manner of similitude.”—That he did not desire to see some such symbol of the divine presence as had been frequently shown of old, and was termed the Shekinah, is not equally clear. Yet our Lord’s answer renders it very probable this was not his wish.—Certainly he could not be so ignorant as to suppose that the Father could be distinctly seen, or perfectly known, by such a finite and limited creature as man. He knew, no doubt, that the knowledge of God is “high as heaven,—deeper than hell;—that the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.” (Job. xi. 8, 9.)—Nor can we reasonably suppose that he was desirous to have that vision, or knowledge of God, while he was on earth, which the saints will be favoured with when the veil of flesh is removed, and they shall no longer “see through a glass darkly.” (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) It is most probable, from the answer of Jesus, that he desired such a manifestation, or knowledge of the Father, as might serve for every purpose of salvation, both present and eternal. And he rightly conceived that Christ was able to communicate this to him, and his fellow disciples; that he could fully manifest the Father to them, instructing them outwardly by his doctrine, and enlightening them inwardly by his Spirit. But whatever Philip meant precisely, we may lawfully

understand his words in this sense, and adopt them as a prayer offered up for ourselves to Christ. — —

II. THE IMPORTANT LIGHT IN WHICH HE VIEWED THE SUBJECT OF IT.

The words of Philip express the satisfaction he should have, if his petition were granted; or the very important light in which he regarded the blessing he asked. “It sufficeth us;” or, as Dr. Doddridge renders it, *It is enough for us.*

It sufficeth for every purpose of divine and saving *instruction*. It is the most valuable and important part of religious knowledge. (Phil. iii. 8.) It includes in it every other branch, or leads to every other. To know God’s nature and attributes, the relations in which he stands to us as our Creator, Preserver, Law-giver, Sovereign, God in covenant, his Providence over us, his ways and dispensations towards us, certainly includes, or implies, the knowledge of our duty to him, and to our fellow-creatures, an acquaintance with our present privileges, and future hopes; at least the knowledge of these things will follow upon it, because it will lead us to study the Scriptures, which may be called, the doctrine of God, and the history of his providence and dealings with men, and will enlighten, enlarge, ennoble, strengthen, purify, and comfort the mind above all other knowledge. — —

It sufficeth for every purpose of *piety*.—It will save us from a profane and careless spirit, and produce solemnity and seriousness, reverence and fear, awe and veneration, before “the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity.” (Isai. lvii. 15.)—From hypocrisy,

producing sincerity and uprightness of heart, before that omnipresent and omniscient Being, who “searches the heart and tries the reins.”—From formality in divine worship, producing spirituality before him who is a spirit, and who cannot be pleased with any mere form of godliness, however excellent.—From Pharisaism, or self righteousness, since it will humble and abase all in whom it is found. (Job. xl. 4, 5; xlii. 5, 6; Isai. vi. 5.)—From Antinomianism, or unrighteousness; for it implies that God’s law is written on the heart. (Jer. xxxi. 33; see 1 John ii. 3, 4.)—From diffidence, distrust, and dejection, inspiring confidence and peace. (Psal. ix. 10.)—He is known as a pardoning God, merciful and gracious, “forgiving iniquity, and remembering sin no more.” (Jer. xxxi. 34; Heb. viii. 12.) Hence “he will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on him, because he trusteth in him.” (Isai. xxvi. 3.)—From alienation and enmity, such as is described in Eph. iv. 17, 18, Col. i. 21; and the whole carnal mind, producing in its place, love to God and man. (1 John iv. 8.)—From lukewarmness and sloth, both in his worship and service; making us zealous for his glory, whose glory we see to be of infinite worth and importance.—From self-will, discontent, impatience, producing submission, resignation, contentment, under a conviction that his Providence is over all, and that he “numbers the very hairs of our head.” — —

Thus it sufficeth for every purpose of *virtue*, or righteousness towards our neighbour.—It renders us just and true in all our dealings, knowing that in all things we have to do with him, and that he is a “God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right.” We perceive in the character of God, and in his proceedings,

the amiableness, excellency, and necessity of truth and justice, and observe, that he is the avenger of falsehood and wrong.—It renders us meek, and gentle, and forgiving, knowing that he claims “vengeance” as belonging to himself, that “he will repay,” and that he will not forgive us, unless we forgive others.—Merciful, and compassionate, knowing that he is such; and that we are required to “be merciful, as our Father in heaven.” Benevolent, kind, and bountiful, knowing that “he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust;” and “is kind to the unthankful, and to the evil.”—Thus it produces both inoffensiveness, and usefulness; not only effectually restraining us from working ill to our neighbour, but exciting us, “as we have opportunity, to do good to all men.” — —

All these effects being united, *knowledge, piety, and virtue*, it appears that the blessing which we suppose to be requested in the petition of the text, leads to the restoration of the divine image in the soul, and puts us in possession of the divine nature; (2 Cor. iii. 18;) and the infallible consequence of this is happiness. It communicates peace with God. peace of mind, communion with God, immortal hopes, eternal life begun on earth. “This is life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” (John xvii. 3.)—As it is accompanied with the life of grace on earth, so it leads to, and ensures, a life of glory. For through it we have a title to it, a meetness for it, and a foretaste of it. — —

III. WHAT WAS INTENDED IN OUR LORD'S ANSWER TO HIM.

Our Lord did not mean that he was the Father; or, that he and the Father are one person. If so, there could be no Mediator between God and man, which the Scriptures assures us to be the case. It is true our Lord says, "I and my Father are one;" (John x. 30;) but the Greek is not (*εις*) *one person*, but (*εν*) *one thing*; that is, intimately and essentially united, as he here says, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" (Ver. 10.) The simple and very intelligible truth is, that the creating and upholding wisdom and word of the Father, was incarnated and made visible in the human nature in Christ. So that God and man is one Christ. Not that the Godhead is the soul of the manhood, for Christ had a reasonable soul which "increased in wisdom," as well as a body "which increased in stature." But our Lord meant, that in his person, as well as by his doctrine, miracles, benevolence, life, death, resurrection, ascension, God is manifested, as far as could be, even to our senses, as well as to our understanding, and that this is the clearest manifestation God has been pleased to make of himself to man on earth. Hence, to such as wish to know God, we must say, Behold and consider, not only his works of creation; "the invisible things of him" which "from the creation of the world," clearly manifest "his eternal power and Godhead." — Look, not only at the dispensations of Providence, which manifest such attributes as the works of creation were not calculated to discover,—nor read and consider only his

word, which shows him still more,—but behold the person of his Son who is “the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature,” (Col. i. 15,) “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” (Heb. i. 3; John i. 18.)—Would we discover the Father’s wisdom? let us hearken to him, who was the wisdom and word of God incarnate, and by whom divine wisdom spoke.—Would we know the Father’s power? let us observe it in the miracles of Christ.—Would we know how holy God is, and the nature of his holiness? let us observe the spirit which Jesus breathed, and the conduct he maintained.—Would we know whether God be a kind, benevolent, and compassionate Being, and what is the nature of his benevolence and love? we must look how these qualities were displayed in the character of Jesus Christ.—Would we see his meekness, patience, forbearance, and long-suffering? let us observe how these dispositions shone forth in Christ.—Would we have a display of his justice? let us see sin condemned and punished in him who “gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.” Would we perceive a manifestation of divine mercy? let us consider God as providing this sacrifice; not “sparing his own Son, but delivering him up for us all;” and observe, how Christ, in the days of his flesh, “received sinners,” and conversed with them.—Do we wish to see the love of God exemplified? observe Christ dying for us, “dying for the ungodly” “when we were enemies, reconciling us to God by his death.”—Would we know God as our Creator? observe Christ secretly and insensibly multiplying the loaves and fishes, and, with such scanty provision, feeding many multitudes; observe him giving

sight to the blind, and life to the dead.—Would we know God as our Preserver? let us contemplate Jesus upholding Peter while walking on the water.—As our Governor? let us observe him controlling the powers of nature, “rebuking the winds and the sea, and producing a great calm.”—As our Redeemer? see him “giving his life a ransom for us,” and “suffering the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”—As our Saviour? consider him coming “to seek and to save that which was lost.”—Would we know God as a Friend? mark the familiarity and tenderness with which Jesus conversed with his disciples.—As a Father? observe Jesus “begetting us again by his Gospel,” and see his parental care for his disciples.—As a Husband? see an emblem of our Maker becoming such in the love and care of Jesus for his spouse, the Church.—In a word; if we wish to know the mind, dispositions, and intentions of God towards man, we must see them delineated and exhibited in the doctrine, example, and works of Christ. — —

In order to this, however, it is necessary we should be enlightened by the divine Spirit; (1 Cor. ii. 11;) that we be “taught,” and “learn of the Father.” (John vi. 45; Matt. xi. 27; xvi. 17.)—While, therefore, employing every proper means to obtain and increase an acquaintance with God, we must maintain a sense of our dependence on him, and with fervent, persevering prayer, in faith, look for the promised influence of the Spirit. — —

APPLICATION.

It has been shown how valuable and important is the attainment of the true knowledge of God.—Nor is it

less needful, than valuable; for without it no one can be truly happy, or safe, since, being ignorant of God, he is alienated from him, and exposed to his everlasting wrath.—All likewise have the means of attaining it, all at least to whom the Gospel is given in which God is so plainly declared by his only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.—Christ also, as “the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” is ready to enlighten our minds, and to “give us an understanding that we may know him that is true.” (John i. 9; 1 John v. 20.)—But might he not expostulate with us, as he did with Philip; “Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known me?” as the image of the Father, in whom all his perfections are to be seen?—It would be well to remember, that the longer we have the means of gaining divine knowledge, and increasing in it, the more inexcusable we are, if we be destitute of it or deficient in it.—And whatever human learning, or temporal wealth we acquire, we have cause for the deepest shame and humiliation if we know not God. (1 Cor. xv. 34.)

CXIII.

BELIEVERS BRANCHES IN THE TRUE VINE.

JOHN XV. 2.

Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

WHAT a variety of metaphors and similitudes does the Lord Jesus employ to illustrate the nature, and point out the necessity of that vital union with himself, which is the essence of all true religion, and the source of those different relations in which he is pleased to stand to his Church and people. Sometimes he represents himself as a Shepherd; and believers as his sheep; sought, saved, protected, and fed by him. At other times he styles himself their Master, and them his disciples and servants, learning of him, and employed by him. At other times, again, he represents himself as their Bridegroom and Husband, and the whole Church in general, and each member thereof, in particular, as his bride, and his spouse. He is our “foundation and chief corner stone,” and we “as lively stones are built up” upon him, “a spiritual house.” He is “the living bread that came down from heaven,” and we are to feed upon him, till he is incorporated into our very being. He is our Head, and “we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” In this discourse from

which the words of the text are taken, he calls himself the Vine, and his people the branches.—

As our Lord was proceeding with his disciples, from the place in which he had instituted his own supper, towards the garden of Gethsemane, the vines, which they observed growing by the way, appear to have suggested this beautiful simile; or, his having so lately drunk of the fruit of the vine with his disciples, declaring, afterwards that he would “drink no more of it, until the kingdom of God should come,” might occasion his use of this comparison to express the relation which exists between himself, and his true followers. (See Psal. lxxx. 8; Isai. v. 1—7.)

Let me inquire,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEING A BRANCH IN CHRIST, AND WHO ARE PROPERLY BRANCHES IN HIM.

In order to be such, we must be *cut off* from the stock which is wild by nature. (Rom. xi. 24.)—This stock is our natural and sinful state and conversation, derived by tradition from our fathers. (1 Pet. i. 18) In this state we are under the dominion and influence of Satan; the world, the flesh and sin.—Growing in this stock we bring forth evil fruit.—We begin to be cut off from it when we are convinced of our sin, humbled, and brought to repentance. Hence we *begin* to die to all dependence on our own wisdom, righteousness, and strength; to all love of the world and sin; we “come out from among them, and are separate, and touch not the unclean thing.” (2 Cor. vi. 17)—We are actually “*cut off*,” so to speak, when we experience a death to the world, ourselves, and sin.— —

We must be *ingrafted into Christ*. (Rom. xi. 24.) The usual way of ingrafting is not to insert a wild scion into a good stock, but a good scion into a wild stock; to which it communicates its changing efficacy, causing it to bear fruit. But that circumstance appears not to be regarded by the Apostle in the passage referred to; where the method of ingrafting supposed, is the reverse of that commonly used; the wild olive being ingrafted on the good.—When our souls are united to Christ, we have an interest in him; He is ours in his person and perfections, in his love and sufferings, in his humiliation and exaltation, in his offices and characters, in his grace and glory:—we have union with him; “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit:”—which union is effected by *faith*, whereby we come to him, receive him, and depend upon him; and *love*, whereby we freely and fully give ourselves to him. — —

In consequence of this, grace is communicated from him as sap from the tree to the graft inserted in it, whence we have life, and growth, and fruitfulness. Where these are not, the graft has not taken effect. — —

Hence it appears evidently who are branches in him. —Negatively; not all who have been baptized, and are reckoned members of the visible Church; (Rom. ii. 25—29;) who profess to know God, and to have religion; (2 Tim. ii. 19;) who use the means of grace; (2 Tim. iii. 5;) who live an inoffensive life; (Rev. iii. 1;) who do external good works. (1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3.)—But, positively, they are those who have experienced true repentance and faith, and are in Christ new creatures. (2 Cor. v. 17.) — —

II. WHAT IS THE FRUIT WHICH SUCH ARE EXPECTED TO BEAR.

In general. All the inward and outward fruits of the Spirit of God are expected. (Gal. v. 22; Eph. v. 9; ii. 10.) Till we are in Christ we cannot produce these, any more than a bad tree can bring forth good fruit; but, being in Christ, we can, and ought, to bring them forth. — —

In particular. Such must glorify God, (Matt. v. 13—16,) and must “shew forth his praises,” his virtues, and perfections. (1 Pet. ii. 9.) — — They must declare by word and deed, in their experience, spirit, converse, and behaviour, what God is in himself, what he is to his people, what he does for them, what he does in them, what he does by them, that others may find him such to them, and may have similar experience. — — Such must do no harm, but do good to men; “for love worketh no ill to his neighbour;” but, on the contrary, profits him in his character, his property, his body, his soul. (Phil. ii. 15.) This implies the cultivation of truth, justice, mercy, charity. (Heb. xiii. 16; Tit. iii. 8; Phil. i. 10, 11.)—Such must also cultivate, and maintain towards themselves, temperance in all its branches, chastity, self denial, purity, universal holiness. (Heb. xii. 14.) — —

III. INTO THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEARING, OR NOT BEARING, THIS FRUIT.

If we do not bring forth this fruit,—we gradually lose our grace, which, not being exercised and employed, is withdrawn and lost.—We are actually cut off

from Christ, as an unfruitful branch is lopped off from a vine. (Ver. 2.)—We wither in our fruits, our blossoms, and our very leaves; in our works, graces, and gifts.—We are cast out of the vineyard, separated, not only from Christ, but his members, and the visible Church, in which we no longer labour, nor are protected. — — We are gathered by the enemy; associated with sinners.—We are cast into the fire and burned. (Ezek. xv. 2—7.) The vine that bears no fruit is worth nothing. — —

If we do produce fruit,—we are purged, or purified, (ver. 2,) by the Spirit, through the word, (ch. xvii. 17,) which is believed, and obeyed; (Acts xv 9; 1 Pet. i. 22;) by afflictions. (Heb. xii. 4—11.)—Hence we bring forth more fruit.—The reality of our discipleship is made more apparent. (Ver. 8.)—We glorify God in a greater degree, (Ver. 8.)—We are more profitable to our neighbour.—We receive the answer of all our prayers. (Ver. 7.)—We have more satisfaction, peace, and comfort, in our own souls.—We are saved for ever,—and we shall receive greater degrees of glory and happiness. — —

IV. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO BEAR THIS FRUIT.

By *abiding in Christ, and Christ in us.* (Ver. 5.) We shall not otherwise be fruitful, (ver. 4,) for otherwise we shall want life, inclination, knowledge, and power.—But thus we shall bear fruit; for in this way we shall derive grace, which gives all these, life, inclination, knowledge, and power. — —

We abide in him, by abiding in faith, in God, in his revealed will, in his Gospel and its truths, in Christ, in

the promises. (John vi. 47—58; Gal. ii. 20; Heb. x. 38; and especially Rom. xi. 16—24)—By continuing in love. (John xv. 9; Gal. v. 6.) Hence arises deadness to the world, and power over sin.—By continuing to obey. (John xv. 10; xiv. 23, 24.) —

In order to these, the use of all prescribed means is necessary, as the word, prayer, watchfulness, self-denial. —

Thus Christ will abide in us by his Spirit, its witness and fruits. (John xii. 46; viii. 12; xiv. 16; i. 5, 6.)

CXIV.

ABIDING IN CHRIST.

JOHN xv. 4.

Abide in me, and I in you.

THERE are few, if any, commands given to the people of God, in his holy word, more delightful to them on the one hand, or more important on the other, than that to which I now request your attention. Considering who he is that speaks these words, how wise to direct, how powerful to defend, how mighty to save, and how loving to comfort; considering how necessary he is to our happiness in time and eternity, it must appear a great privilege to be permitted to abide in him; which is, in fact, to abide in safety, in honour, in wealth, in pleasure, in light and life, in wisdom, holiness, and happiness; but we have not only this privilege granted us, but are even commanded, nay courted, to abide in

him. The command is not to abide *with* him merely, as in the same city, under him as a chief magistrate, or in the same family, he being a Son over his own house, with him, as a friend and brother; but *in* him, by vital union and communion; that is, to be in paradise with him.—

Having lately discoursed from the second verse of this chapter, my present address is intended as a sequel to that discourse.—And I shall consider,

I. TO WHOM THE COMMAND IS GIVEN.

It is given to those that are already in him. This is the case with none by nature, or by a natural birth.—We are naturally in the first Adam, and, therefore, involved in sin and death. (Rom. v. 12, 17.)

But we must be in the second Adam, in whom we obtain righteousness and life. — — We are at first in nature, possessed merely of the powers of nature, as understanding, will, affections; but we must be in grace, which raises us above nature, purifies all our faculties, and directs them to a proper end.—We are naturally in the *flesh*, influenced and governed by the body, its appetites and senses; (Gen. vi. 5; John iii. 5, 6;) “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” We must be in the Spirit, under the influence and government of his motions and graces.—We are naturally in Belial. (Eph. ii. 2; 1 John v. 18;) inspired, deceived, deluded, corrupted by him; but we must be in Christ.—How? By the knowledge of him; (Phil. iii. 8;)—by faith in him, by love to him, by an interest in him; “that I may *win* Christ;”—by union with him; “and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness.” (Phil. iii. 9.)—

II. WHAT THIS COMMAND IMPLIES.

“Abide in me.”

It implies that we are to retain this knowledge, faith, love, interest, union with Christ; which may be lost.* (Col. i. 23; John xv. 9, 10; Rom. xi. 22; Heb. x. 38.) Now we retain these when we abide in him in our thoughts, not only thinking highly of him, but having our thoughts stayed upon him; when our desires, our designs, our will, both in its choice and resolution, and our affections, are set upon these things; when we dwell upon them in our conversation, and manifest that we love him, and cleave to him in our behaviour.—To illustrate this; we must abide in Christ, as a branch in a tree, which is supported by it, adheres to it, grows in it, and becomes verdant and fruitful by the virtue derived from it; as a hand in a body, from which it receives its warmth, life, activity, and usefulness; as a manslayer in the city of refuge, for as he would be safe only while abiding in the consecrated city, so we are in danger of being overtaken by the curse and wrath of God, unless we have fled to Christ and continue in him; as a besieged city in a fort or garrison,

* To this position, those who hold the doctrine of final perseverance, in the Calvinistic sense, will not accede, notwithstanding the Scriptures adduced in support of it; yet, judicious Calvinists, knowing that every Christian, though possessed of real faith, cannot have an absolute certainty of his final salvation, consider the fear of coming short, as one great means of the true believer's perseverance. It must be acknowledged by all parties, that many for a season “run well,” in their spiritual course, but, afterwards, being hindered, “do not obey the truth;” that many “receive the Word with joy,” but, not “having root in themselves, endure only for a while.” (Gal. v. 7, 8; Matt. xiii. 20, 21.)—*E.*

for we are surrounded and attacked by various enemies; as passengers in a ship, for we are on the sea of this world, tossed with the winds and waves, proceeding on our voyage for the port of eternal bliss, and our safety depends on being in the ship. —

III. THE PROMISE MADE TO THOSE THAT KEEP IT;
AND THE ADVANTAGES RESULTING THEREFROM.

Christ will abide in us, by his word, teaching, instructing, directing, strengthening, supporting, encouraging, comforting us. “That by patience and comfort of the Scriptures, ye might have hope.” (Rom. xv. 4.)—By his Spirit, in his witness as a Spirit of adoption, and in his fruits, which are “love, joy, peace,” &c. (Rom. viii. 15; Gal. v. 22, 23.)—By the efficacy of his body and blood. (John vi. 56, 57.)—By his indwelling presence, as our “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” (1 Cor. i. 30.) And by permitting us to have communion and fellowship with him. “I will sup with him, and he with me.” (Rev. iii. 20.)

Hence we shall have pardon, acceptance, adoption, safety, access. All our prayers shall be heard; “Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (Ver. 7; Mark xi. 24.)—We shall abound in the fruits of righteousness; “the same bringeth forth much fruit.” (Ver. 5, 6; 2 Cor. ix. 8.)—Grace shall be continued, and more increased;—the perfections of God shall be manifested and “glorified” in our perfected salvation; the joy of Christ, on account of our constant attachment to him, and its blessed effects will “remain in

us"—and our felicity and joy will be complete. (Ver. 8, 9.) — —

IV. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO KEEP THE COMMAND.

By abiding in a belief of his word, and holding fast all the doctrines, precepts, promises, and threatenings of the Scripture.—By continuing to attend the ordinances, public, domestic, social, and private.—By guarding against hypocrisy, formality, and lukewarmness, in the use of all ordinances, and maintaining sincerity, spirituality, and fervour therein.—By conscientiously keeping his commandments, carefully shunning sin of commission and omission, and whatever is calculated to grieve his Spirit.—By guarding against an evil heart of unbelief, (Heb. iii. 12,) and "holding fast our confidence."—By guarding against the love of this present evil world, its cares, wealth, honours, or pleasure; and retaining a holy deadness to it.—By cultivating a spiritual and heavenly mind.—By setting death, judgment, and eternity before us; and not daring to promise ourselves one day or hour.—By living continually in a spirit of prayer, watchfulness, and self-denial.—By avoiding softness and self-indulgence, and taking up the daily cross. — —

CXV.

JESUS PRAYS THAT HIS DISCIPLES MAY BE KEPT FROM THE EVIL.

JOHN XVII. 15.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

Thus spake the Son of God in that very solemn and important prayer which he addressed to his heavenly Father, a few hours before his passion; a prayer which was probably intended as a model of the intercession which he makes for his people in heaven, and affords a most comfortable and edifying representation of the invariable disposition of his mind, both towards God and his church. We may learn from it, what blessings we need, what blessings he continually prays that we may receive, in what way we may look for them, and the encouragement we have to believe that looking for them in that way, we shall obtain them. Hereby, therefore, we are taught, and that much more largely than in what is termed our "Lord's prayer," both the requests we should most earnestly offer for ourselves, and the desires which should fill our souls, if we wish to be conformed to the mind of Christ, and to have the end of his mediation, of his sacrifice, and intercession, answered in us. Here the heart of Christ is, as it were, unveiled, the workings of it are laid open, and his unspeakable love to us, and concern for our salvation, is as much apparent as his love to his Father, or

his zeal for his glory. In calling your attention to this important passage of Holy Scripture, perhaps the most spiritual, edifying, and consolatory, in the whole Book of God; I shall show,

I. OF WHOM OUR LORD SPEAKS HERE IN HIS PRAYER.

The Apostles are doubtless the persons primarily meant.—These were, in a peculiar manner, given to Christ out of the world, (ver. 6,) “as his pupils to be educated by him, while he was upon earth, and as his agents, to be employed for him when he went to heaven; to be learners of his doctrine, the witnesses of his life and miracles,” his death and resurrection, his sufferings and glory, “the publishers of his Gospel, and the planters of his church.”*—To these, in a peculiar manner, he manifested his own and his Father’s name, and hence “they knew the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he had sent.” (Ver. 3.)—To these he had given the words which his Father had given him; (ver. 8;) had made, and would still make known his whole Gospel; and they had “received and kept” what he had delivered to them. (Ver. 6, 8.)—When, therefore, their character was formed according to the model of the instruction they received, they “were not of the world, even as he was not of the world,” as to their views, designs, desires, cares and pursuits. Like their Master, they neither resembled the people of the world, nor loved the things of the world.—Hence they were “hated” and “persecuted” by the world. (John xv. 19, 20; Gal. iv. 29.)

* Henry.

But this prayer is by no means to be confined to the Apostles, or even to the first disciples of our common Lord. It belongs to all who are in a similar state of mind, and bear a similar character; even to all, in whatever nation or age, “who believe in Jesus through their word” and testimony, and are by faith united to him and one another. (Ver. 20.) — —

As to the nature and importance of this faith; to believe in him through their word, is to be fully and deeply persuaded that he is what they have represented him;—The Word and Son of God, pre-existing, incarnate, living, dying, rising, ascending, interceding, as set forth in their writings. (John xx. 31.)—A divinely commissioned Teacher, whose doctrine, sealed by his blood, confirmed by his resurrection, attested by miracles many and mighty, and by prophecies fulfilled, is as deeply important as it is infallibly true, and, therefore, should be seriously considered and laid to heart, as well as credited.—A Redeemer, Mediator, and Saviour; to whom we must apply, and in whom we are to confide, for the fulfilment of those great offices.—A Lawgiver, Governor, and Judge; whose laws faith induces us to obey, as well as to submit to his control, and to prepare to meet him at his bar. (Heb. v. 9.)—An example; whom we learn by faith the necessity of imitating, and are enabled so to do.—This faith is not only of absolute necessity, but incomparable worth. (John iii. 16, 36.)

Union with Christ and his people is the consequence of this faith, according to Christ’s prayer, ver. 21. Thus 2 Cor. xiii. 5; John xv. 1. — —

This union is not merely nominal and external, as by baptism, and church membership, but real and inter-

nal. They are united to him and his people, in faith and love, and he dwells in them by his Spirit. (Gal. ii. 20; 1 John iii. 24; 1 Cor. xii. 13.) Hence it is compared to the union of friendship, of marriage, of a tree and its branches, of the head and its members, which are all real unions.—It is not imperceptible, but sensible; (John xiv. 15, 16;) it implies love, joy, peace, &c. and is, as it were, felt and tasted. (1 Pet. ii. 2; Heb. vi. 4.) It is not lifeless and dead, but vital and quickening: the union of a branch with a tree, of the members with the head, are all of a vital nature; there being in each of them a real communication of life; and so it is here. (John xiv. 19; Rom. viii. 10.)—It is not inefficient and barren, but prolific, and fruitful. The above-mentioned unions, as of friendship, marriage, &c. are all fruitful; and so is this. (John xv. 14; Rom. vii. 4; John xv. 2, 5; Eph. iv. 15, 16; Col. ii. 19.) —

Such as thus believe, and are united to Christ, are, like the Apostles, given to him, as “having heard and learned of the Father,” and being “drawn” by him. (John vi. 37, 45.) They are given, as Henry says, “as patients to the physician to be healed, as children to a tutor to be taught, as sheep to the shepherd to be kept.” They know the Father and the Son experimentally and practically;—They have “received and kept his words;”—They “are not of the world;” (1 John ii. 15, 16; v. 4; Jam. iv. 4;)—They are more or less “hated and persecuted,” by the world; (Gal. iv. 29; 2 Tim. ii. 11—13; iii. 12;) and “in the world have tribulation.”

• Nevertheless, Christ did not pray that they might be taken out of the world: and this leads us to consider,

II. WHAT HE DOES NOT ASK THE FATHER FOR THEM.

He did not pray that they might be immediately removed by death, or, while in the world, be exempted from the afflictions and troubles of it.

The world being continually vexatious and troublesome to the followers of Christ, they may, perhaps, frequently desire to be taken out of it, and placed “where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.” Thus Job, Elijah, Jonah, and even Moses, when they met with things that grieved them, prayed that “God would take away their lives.”—But though the difficulties, trials, and sufferings, to which his disciples would be exposed, would be many and great, yet Jesus did not thus pray for them. He knew it would neither be for his glory, nor for the good of mankind, nor for their own advantage, that they should be taken out of the world,—It would not be for *his glory*. They are required to “show forth,” as St. Peter says, the “praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light;” (1 Epist. ii. 9.) that is, to make known his virtues and perfections by their tempers, words, and deeds, that mankind may be brought to know, fear, love, and serve him; to show forth the life and death, sufferings and glory, person and offices, of the Lord Jesus, and thereby to bring men to believe in him, to love and obey him; to display the truth and grace of the Gospel: hence it would not be for the glory of God they should be removed.—It would not be for the *good of mankind*. “The world,” says the Author above quoted, “though sick of them, (Acts xxii. 22,) and therefore not worthy of them,

(Heb. xi. 38,) yet can ill spare them." They are the "light of the world;" (Matt. v. 14;) and were it not for them, the world would be in midnight darkness, as to divine things. By their doctrine and example, their conversation and behaviour, they are the means of dispersing the prevailing ignorance and folly, and making men "wise unto salvation." They are "the salt of the earth," and were it not for them, the world would be hateful to God from its depravity, as it was once, when God, to punish or cure its corruption, brought a flood of waters upon it. They are to season the world with knowledge and grace, and thus prevent or cure its growing corruption. Without them, the world would be insipid and unsatisfactory to the spiritual taste. The spirit, conversation, and conduct of mankind would generally be unprofitable and disagreeable; but by the doctrine of the Gospel, (which, like salt, is penetrating, quickening, and conservative, and gives a relish, as it were, to whatever receives it) they were to season and render it savoury; that, at least, a people out of it, like a sacrifice seasoned with salt, might be acceptable to God, "being sanctified by the Holy Ghost." (Rom. xv. 16.) In another point of view, they were to leaven the earth with piety and virtue, or with true religion; for the kingdom of God, which they were to extend to the uttermost of their power, is "like leaven." (Matt. xiii. 33.) In pity, therefore, to this world, dark, corrupt, and tasteless, Christ will not have his disciples removed out of it, especially for the sake of those that he foreknows "will believe in him through their word." And it may be observed in general, that the removal of the righteous by death, is always an occasion of regret, on account of those that

are left; and when it happens, ought to be laid to heart, as no favourable omen. (Isa. lvii. 1, 2.) But, again, Christ will not have them immediately taken out of the world, because it is not *for their own good*. They must continue in it for a season, that they may grow in grace, in faith, in hope, in love, in meekness, in long-suffering, &c. may increase in the image of God, in a conformity to their living Head, and so ripen for the glory designed them; that they may weather out all the storms of life, endure the afflictions and troubles appointed for them, and thus both be refined and purified, or “perfected through sufferings,” and also fitted to receive a greater reward, as a recompense for these sufferings; that they may labour more and longer, and do the work assigned to them, and on this account also receive a greater reward. (1 Cor. iii. 8; Rev. xxii. 12; xx. 12; Heb. vi. 10; Gal. vi. 7—10.)

And as Christ did not pray that his disciples might be taken out of the world by death; so neither did he pray that they might be exempted from the troubles of it, and fixed in a situation of ease and prosperity, where they might live undisturbed, and enjoy constant delight and pleasure. “Not that they may be kept,” as the same writer observes, “from conflict with the world, but that they may not be overcome by it;” not that they may leave their people, as Jeremiah wished, and go from them,” (Jer. ix. 2,) but that like Ezekiel, (Ezek. iii. 8,) their “faces may be strong against the faces of the wicked.” —

But is there not great danger in this? Do we not run a great risk of being entangled in the errors, and of being polluted by the vices and corruptions of the

world? Certainly we do. And we are thus brought to consider,

III. WHAT CHRIST ASSURES US HE DOES ASK, AND IN WHAT WAY WE MAY EXPECT THE IMPORTANT BLESSING FOR WHICH HE PRAYED.

Christ has prayed that we may be “kept from the evil;” and this prayer has been and will be answered in the sense in which it was intended, in behalf of all that use the means he has appointed. But in what sense are they preserved from the evil?—From the evil of destructive error. Mark the great stress laid by our Lord and his Apostles, on adhering to the truth. “Beware,” said Jesus, “of the leaven,” that is, of the doctrine, “of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” (Matt. xvi. 6.) “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” (John viii. 31.) “Hold fast,” said St. Paul, “the form of sound words.” (2 Tim. i. 13.) “Continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” (Col. i. 23.) He laments over some who had “swerved” from the true doctrine, and “turned aside unto vain jangling,” (1 Tim. i. 6,) who had “made shipwreck of faith,” who, “concerning the truth, had erred,” and, as one instance of their error, “said the resurrection was passed already, and destroyed the faith of some.” We may here observe, that it is a great mistake to suppose it to be of no consequence what sentiments we hold; and that it is of great importance to believe and speak as the Oracles of God direct, and to hold the great doctrines there revealed.—From the evil of sin; of known sin, inward or outward,

of omission or commission. Without this we can never retain our knowledge nor love of God, our justification nor sanctification, our peace with God nor peace of mind, our title to, nor meetness for, heaven; can neither edify our neighbour, nor be holy ourselves.—From the evil of backsliding or departing from God in heart; the evil heart of unbelief; (how dangerous and destructive the tendency of this!) of “forsaking the Fountain of living waters, and hewing out to ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water,” (Jer. ii. 15,) of “leaving our first love,” (Rev. ii. 4,) of “not abiding in Christ,” (Jehn xv. 4—6,) of not continuing in his goodness,” (Rom. xi. 22,) of becoming “neither cold nor hot,” (Rev. iii. 15,) of being “twice dead, plucked up by the roots,” of “beginning in the Spirit,” and ending in “the flesh,” and thus “drawing back unto perdition.” (Heb. x. 39.)—But not only must we interpret Christ as praying they may be delivered from the *evil thing*; from sin and every thing that connects with it, or leads to it; but, as the words may be rendered, from the *evil one*, viz., the Devil, or any of his children; from Satan that he may not have leave to “sift them as wheat.” (Luke xxii. 31.) How soon the strongest fail, when he has permission to do so, we learn from the case of Peter, (Matt. xxvi. 69—75;) (Job, ch. i. 12—22; ii. 6—8; iii. 1,) and others. Or that “their faith may not fail; and that they may not fall into infidelity, carelessness, or despair.—From the evil, (we may add,) of the world; from the snares of it; whether of prosperity or adversity, or those laid by the people of it; from the tribulation of it, so that it may have no sting, but that they may be brought safe through it; that the nature of

their afflictions may be so altered, that there may be no real evil in them, nothing to do them harm. — —

But how are Christ's disciples to be kept from the evil?—Through God's name; (ver. 11;) *i. e.*, his nature or attributes, as—his *wisdom*, whereby he knows them and their dangers, trials, wants, and the means of protecting, delivering, and providing for them; his *power*, (1 Pet. i. 5,) manifested in defending, strengthening, relieving, preserving them, and executing those ways and means which his wisdom points out; his *love*, setting that wisdom and power to work; his *faithfulness*, which hath promised and will perform—In his name, as in “a strong tower,” or place of defence. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” (Prov. xviii. 10.) “God is a refuge and strength, a very present help in the time of trouble; therefore will we not fear.” (Psal. xli. 1, 2.) “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” (Isai. xxvi. 1.) Believers must have unspeakable comfort in knowing that Christ has committed them to the care of his heavenly Father. They cannot be unsafe whom the Almighty keeps, and he cannot but keep those whom the Son of his love commits to him.—In and by those means, whereby God has made and does make himself known to them; his word and ordinances, the means of grace, and grace in the use of means, producing the knowledge, fear, and love of his name; by faith in it, and prayer to it. They are kept, who by faith “commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator. (1 Pet. iv. 19; 2 Tim. i. 12.)

Upon the whole, we behold Christ in this intercessory prayer, most graciously commending his dis-

ciples to the protection of God, that they may not be run down by the malice of their enemies; that they and all their concerns may be the particular care of Divine providence; that their lives may be preserved till their work be done; that their consciences may be kept in peace, their minds untainted with error, their hearts undefiled with sin, and, of consequence, that their comforts may be continued, and not broke in upon by the hardships they meet with. And to this prayer is owing the wonderful preservation of a Gospel ministry and Gospel Church, in the world, to this day. — —

[This discourse should be concluded with suitable INFERENCES, and a particular APPLICATION.]

CXVI.

THE TRUTH DELIVERED AND ATTESTED BY JESUS.

JOHN XVIII. 37

To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

How gladly would the leading people among the Jews, for the quiet of their own consciences, and the peace of their own minds, have persuaded themselves,

as they endeavoured to persuade their heathen governor, Pilate, and others, that it was not only lawful, but even necessary to put Jesus to death. "He stirreth up the people," said they; "he maketh himself a king, and whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." Nay, "we have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." This last accusation the Roman Procurator did not understand, and on hearing it, after he had been informed, as we may reasonably suppose he was, of many of the wonderful and mighty works which Jesus had performed, it appears he felt considerable fear, and, therefore, went again into the judgment hall, and seriously asked him, "Whence art thou?" To this inquiry Jesus gave no answer, for, indeed, Pilate was not prepared to receive a reply to it, having paid little attention to the answers which Christ had already given to some other questions he had put to him; answers, which sufficiently showed that his kingdom did not interfere with that of Cæsar, being "not of this world;" and being neither more nor less than the prevalence and reign of truth. "To this end was I born, &c." Indeed, in these two points of view, more particularly, the ministry of Christ provoked the malice and enmity of the Jews. For being carnally minded, and blinded by error and prejudice, they could not but oppose a kingdom spiritual in its nature, and founded in truth and grace. And, for similar reasons, the carnal part of mankind, in every age and nation, dislike and oppose the true and genuine religion of Jesus Christ, and all those that zealously promote and practice it. —

Inquire we,

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE TRUTH HERE? AND FOR WHAT SPECIAL REASONS IT WAS THE END OF CHRIST'S BEING BORN, AND COMING INTO THE WORLD TO BEAR WITNESS TO IT?

By *the truth* we are to understand—that of which Jesus Christ is said to have been “full;” (John i. 14;) as he was of “grace,” and which, as well as grace, “came by him,” in contradistinction from the law, which “was given by Moses.” (John i. 17.)—That into which the “Spirit of truth” was promised to guide his disciples; which, “if they continued in his word,” (John viii. 31, 32.) they were to “know,” and which was to “make them free.”—That truth, of which St. Paul speaks, (Eph. iv. 21,) where he says, “If ye have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, that ye put off—the old man, and put on the new man.”—That truth, the “love” of which, he says, those who perish do “not receive, that they might be saved;” (2 Thess. ii. 10;) and which the Galatian believers, being “bewitched,” or deceived, did not continue to “obey;” (ch. iii. 1;) “concerning which Hymeneus and Philetus “erred, saying, that the resurrection was past already;” (2 Tim. ii. 18;) and from which we are warned some will “turn away their ears,” even such as “will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears,” or desiring variety and novelty. (2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.)—That truth, to the experimental and practical “knowledge of which, such as are led away by their own lusts, although ever learn-

ing, are not able to come," (2 Tim. iii. 7,) which many, however, being in part acquainted with it, "hold in unrighteousness." (Rom. i. 18.) In short, (for it would be endless to refer to all the passages in which the truth is spoken of in the New Testament,) it is "the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation;" (Eph. i. 13;) termed sometimes, "the faith of the Gospel," (Gal. i. 23.) because it is the great object of faith, and "the faith once delivered to the saints," (Jude 3,) and "the mystery of the faith, to be held in a pure conscience." (1 Tim. iii. 9.)

It includes all the doctrines of the Gospel, especially those that are of a primary and leading importance, as those concerning the fall and recovery of man, his corruption through sin, and salvation by grace; the divinity, atonement, and mediation of Christ; the agency and influences of the Holy Spirit. — It includes, also, the precepts, promises, and threatenings, declared in the Word of God. It is that system of truth, the articles of which are linked together in a kind of chain; that analogy or "proportion of faith," according to which every one that prophecies or preaches is to conform his doctrine, (Rom. xii. 6,) that he may "speak as the oracles of God." (1 Pet. iv. 11.) —

Now the end for which Christ was miraculously conceived and born, and came from "the glory which he had with the Father before the world was," (John xvii. 5,) for which, when "he was rich," he "for our sakes became poor;" (2 Cor. viii. 9;) when "in the form of God, and he thought it not robbery to be equal with God," he "made himself of no reputation—and became obedient unto death;" (Phil. ii. 6—8;)—the

end, I say, was, as he himself here states, that he "might bear witness unto *the truth*." It is certain he came also for other important ends, as to fulfil the ancient predictions concerning the Messiah, (Luke xxiv. 44,) to "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," (Heb. ix. 26,) to set us "an example that we should follow his steps." (1 Pet. ii. 21; 1 John ii. 6.) But one very principal end, an end without which the others would have been unavailing, was that here spoken of, to bear witness unto the truth, as God's incarnate wisdom, word, and truth, and thereby fully to reveal to us his Father's will. Hence we read, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." (Heb. i. 1, 2.)

The *reasons* of this are—Because the truth is the chief, nay, the only means of our illumination. (Psal. xix. 7, 8.) If we are translated "out of darkness into marvellous light;" (1 Pet. ii. 9;) if we, who "were sometime darkness, are now light in the Lord;" if we are "not of the night nor of darkness," but "children of the light, and children of the day," (1 Thess. v. 5;) it is surely not by error and false doctrine, but by the truth. Hence the Holy Scriptures, which are "a light shining in a dark place," (2 Pet. i. 19,) are said to be able to make us "wise unto salvation;" (2 Tim. iii. 15, 16;) and we read of the "light of the glorious Gospel." (2 Cor. iv. 4.)—Because it is the chief means of quickening us, who are naturally "dead in sin," and begetting in us "repentance unto life" and living faith, which "comes by hearing" it; (Rom. x. 17;) hence it is termed the "word of life," (Phil. ii.

16,) and said to be “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;” (Heb. iv. 12;) and Christ’s words are said to be “spirit and life.” (John vi. 63.)—Because it is the grand object, as well as means, of that faith whereby we are saved; (Eph. i. 17, 18;) we are described as being “chosen to salvation through belief of the truth;” (2 Thess. ii. 13; Mark xvi. 16;) its doctrines, precepts, promises, threatenings, are all main objects of faith to those who are saved. — Because it is a principal means of our justification. The original cause of this benefit is the mercy and grace of God; the meritorious cause is Christ’s atonement; the efficient cause is the Holy Ghost, working repentance and faith, and communicating to us a sense of pardon; but the instrumental cause is the “Word of truth,” (John xv. 3,) and faith therein.—Hence the truth is the chief instrument of our regeneration. (Jam. i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 23; Psal. xix. 7.)—By it we are made free, (John viii. 31—36.) It is “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which makes us free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom. viii. 2.)—By it we are safely guided in the way to heaven. (Psal. xix. 11; 2 Pet. i. 19.)—By it we are strengthened for duty, for suffering, and for all the conflicts of our spiritual warfare. The word of truth is connected with the power of God and the armour of righteousness; (2 Cor. vi. 7;) “our loins are to be girt about with truth;” (Eph. vi. 14;) and among other pieces of divine armour, we are exhorted to “take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Eph. vi. 17.)—By the declarations and promises of it, we are comforted and supported amidst all present trials and troubles. (Rom. xv. 4.)—By it we are “thoroughly furnished to every good work,”

and made useful among men; even “burning and shining lights.” (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.)—By it we are at length fully sanctified and perfected in holiness. (John xvii. 17; Eph. iv. 11—16.)—By it we are finally saved. (2 Thess. ii. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2; Rom. i. 16) — —

II. IN WHAT WAY, AND FOR WHAT IMMEDIATE PURPOSES HE BORE WITNESS TO IT?

He did so by word, or by his doctrine, which revealed and explained the truth. Thus he personally, clearly, and fully bore witness to every part of it, as to the unity and perfections of God; (Mark xii. 29; Matt. v. 48;) his spiritual nature; (John iv. 23, 24;) the nature, dignity, condescension, sufferings, death, and exaltation of the Son; (John xiii. 14; viii. 58; xvii. 5; Matt. xx. 18, 19;) our depraved state by nature; (John iii. 5, 6; Matt. xv. 19;) our redemption through him; (John iii. 16;) the nature and necessity of repentance towards God, of faith in himself, of regeneration, of sanctification. (Matt. iv. 17; Luke xviii. 14; Matt. xviii. 3; John xiv. 6; xv. 2; Matt. v. 8, 48.) He also expressly revealed the immortality of the soul, (Matt. xxii. 32,) the resurrection of the body, (John v. 25, 28, 29,) a future judgment, (Matt. xxv. 31, 32; xii. 36,) the joys of heaven, (Matt. xxv. 21,) the miseries of hell. (Luke xvi. 23; Matt. xxv. 46.) In this way he bore witness, that mankind might understand, and have just, clear, and full views of the truth.—By his astonishing miracles, and by prophecies afterwards fulfilled. We may particularly instance in his prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. (Matt. xxiv.; Luke xxi.) Thus he afforded a rational ground,

whereon all men might believe, or be left without excuse. (John v. 36; x. 37, 38; xv. 24.)—By his extreme sufferings, his death, and resurrection; for he laid down his life in attestation of the truth of his doctrine, and witnessed a good confession before the Jewish high priest, and Pontius Pilate. Thus he showed that the truth, which he had delivered, was no trivial matter, but of infinite importance, that mankind might lay it to heart, and maturely consider, and “give earnest heed to it.” (Heb. ii. 1.)—By his Spirit, whose enlightening and gracious influences he imparted to his first disciples, and doth impart to all who call upon him, that they may understand the truth, experience its efficacy, and find it to be “the power of God unto salvation.” (John xv. 26; Acts ii. 39; 1 Thess. i. 5.)—By his example, directing and exciting to the practice of it; his precepts, commanding and enjoining it; his promises, alluring and inviting to it; his threatenings, deterring us from the neglect of it. — — By his Apostles, who were witnesses both to him and the truth; (John xv. 27; Luke xxiv. 48; Acts i. 8, 22; v. 32;) and, like their Master, bore testimony to it, by their doctrine, “declaring the whole counsel of God;” (Acts xx. 20, 21, 27; 2 Cor. ii. 17; iv. 1, 2; 1 Thess. ii. 9, 11, 12;) by their miracles, (Rom. xv. 18, 19; 2 Cor. xii. 12,) and prophecies fulfilled; by their example; (1 Thess. ii. 10; 2 Cor. vi. 3;) by their sufferings; (1 Thess. ii. 2; 2 Tim. i. 8—12; ii. 9—13; 1 Cor. iv. 11—13; 2 Cor. iv. 8—11; vi. 3—10; xi. 23—31.)

Now it may be asked, whether the truth, thus declared and explained, is obscure, or of uncertain interpretation? Thus attested and sealed by the God of heaven, can it be false or doubtful? Thus suffered for,

indifferent or deserving of neglect? Were Christ and his Apostles mistaken in esteeming it as they did? Ought not we to labour, to work, and suffer, to spend and be spent for it? — — But we inquire,

III. WHO ARE OF THE TRUTH, AND HOW THEY HEAR THE VOICE OF CHRIST.

They are “of the truth,”—who are rescued from the influence of that subtle and powerful spirit, who is called “the father of lies,” and are no longer blinded and deceived by him, or by the world and the spirit of it, (1 Cor. ii. 12.) or by the flesh, through Satan’s agency; who are no longer deprived of discernment and judgment, as to their understanding, or of feeling as to their conscience; who are not biassed as to the choice and intention of their will; nor entangled and occupied by the creature in their affections.—Who are sincerely desirous to know, receive, and submit to the truth, however opposed to their preconceived opinions, and their accustomed and confirmed habits.—Who, for this purpose, are truly willing to make any sacrifices, to part with any temporal honour, gratification, or profit, which appears inconsistent with the attainment of this object, and especially, whatever they find in themselves contrary to the divine will, and are ready to submit to any loss, reproach, difficulty, or suffering, to which they may be exposed in the way of obedience.—Who, conscious how liable they are to be mistaken, deceived, and misled, in their inquiries after the truth, and endeavours to obey it, dare not lean to their own understanding, or trust in their own efforts, but apply to God in prayer and faith, to be “guided into all” sacred

and divine “truth.”—Who “call no man master” on earth, but remember “one is their master, even Christ,” (Matt. xxiii. 8,) and, therefore, “seek the law at his mouth.”—Who comply with their duty, as far as they know it already, remembering Christ’s words, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,” (1 John vii. 17)—

Such persons will consider every part of Christ’s doctrine as infallibly true and infinitely momentous, and will, therefore, desire and delight to hear, read, and meditate upon it, at all opportunities. (1 John iv. 5, 6.)—

In regard to the manner of “hearing Christ’s voice,” we should do it,—with reverence,—with humility,—with seriousness,—with attention,—in a childlike and teachable spirit,—with faith,—with love,—with meekness and patience.—in a spirit of prayer,—with an obedient mind. — —

INFERENCES.

We may infer—the greatness of the guilt of those who treat with contempt, or neglect, or indifference, the truth, which Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal, and to which he bore testimony in so extraordinary a manner.—That it is our indispensable duty to give most earnest heed to what he has declared, and to see that we understand, believe, experience, and practise it. We should seriously examine ourselves on this head. — — That latitudinarianism is neither Christianity, nor Christian charity, but unbelief and infidelity.—That we should take care we do not reject, or overlook, any part of Christ’s doctrine, but attend to,

and lay to heart, the whole of it.*—That, in imitation of Jesus and his Apostles, we, also, in our several situations of life, should endeavour to bear witness to the truth; in word, in example, in suffering for it when called thereto, by employing all possible means to spread the knowledge of the Gospel in the world, supporting its ministers, erecting places of Christian worship and instruction, and establishing or maintaining such other institutions as are calculated, through the blessing of God, to promote this great end.

CXVII.

AN INQUIRY INTO OUR LOVE OF CHRIST.

JOHN XXI. 17

Lovest thou me?

SUCH was the interrogation thrice addressed to Peter by the Lord, when he appeared to him, and several others of his disciples, at the sea of Tiberias, being intended to lead him to examine the sincerity of his love to his Master, of which he had given great reason to doubt, by his late denial of him. But the question is one, of all others, the most important which can be put to us, and is put by the Holy Ghost to us all. It is one which we should frequently and seriously ask ourselves; for, on the one hand, “if any man love not

* This may be illustrated by reference to the Socinians, who receive a part only of the doctrine of Christ, and reject whatever is mysterious, and appears unintelligible to human reason.

the Lord Jesus, he is anathema;" *i. e.* exposed to the wrath and curse of God; (1 Cor. xvi. 22;) whereas, the grace and blessing of God is the portion of all those who love him in sincerity. (Eph. vi. 24.) To prevent any mistake, therefore, on such a subject, let us inquire,

I. WHAT THE LORD JESUS DOES NOT DIRECTLY AND IMMEDIATELY ASK IN THESE WORDS.

There is no inquiry made here concerning our religious opinions: not that these are unimportant; but they are no certain evidences of grace.—Nor is there any made concerning religious duties, and yet it is of great importance to use the means of grace, as prayer, reading, and hearing the word, &c.—Nor does he inquire in these words concerning our moral conduct; for though a bad moral conduct would certainly demonstrate our want of love; yet a good one will not prove our possession of it.—Nor concerning our deeds of charity; this, however, is deeply important, (Tit. iii. 8; Gal. v. 6; Jam. ii. 14,) but it is no sure sign of grace. (1 Cor. xiii. 3.)—Nor even concerning our faith, what we believe with regard to him, and what confidence we put in him; not but that this is essential to salvation, and, therefore, ought diligently to be inquired into; not but that it is even the source from whence love itself flows; (1 Pet. ii. 7;) yet still as this may, in a sense, be possessed, and certainly is often professed where love is wanting, and in that case it profits nothing; (Gal. v. 6;) therefore, by inquiring concerning the stream, he, in effect, secures the fountain itself. — —

II. WHAT HE DOES DIRECTLY AND IMMEDIATELY ASK?

“*Lovest thou me?*”

As to the nature of this love. “*Lovest thou me?*” That is,—Dost thou esteem me, in my person, offices, humiliation, exaltation, cross, crown?—Dost thou desire me as thy Teacher, thy Saviour, thy Lawgiver, thy wisdom, thy righteousness, thy sanctification, thy redemption? desire to have an interest in me? union with me?—Dost thou sincerely thank and praise me? art thou truly and affectionately grateful for my love to thee, and what I have done and suffered for thee.—Dost thou delight in me as thy friend, brother, husband, portion?—Dost thou seek and find thy rest in me? — —

As to the fruits of this love. The union of a believer with Jesus is illustrated in Scripture by that of a wife with her husband. The love of Jesus therefore, he being now absent, must resemble that of an affectionate wife to a loving husband, who is abroad in a far country. Inquire we, therefore, how her love would exert and manifest itself.—She would think much of him when alone, and speak much of him when in company, especially when with his and her own friends and relations. She would take pleasure in his honour and advancement in that country to which he was gone. She would be concerned for his interest in the place where she was, and would do every thing in her power to promote it. She would pay a particular attention to all his wishes, and would diligently observe every charge he might have given her at parting. She would be faithful to him in his absence, and not only admit no sharer of her bed, but not even of her heart. She would be respectful, kind, and dutiful, in her regards

and carriage towards any one whom her husband might entrust with his affairs, and appoint to manage his concerns in his absence. She would show kindness to her husband's friends and relatives, and if they were in necessity, she would, according to the utmost of her power, relieve and supply their wants. She would rejoice to correspond with him, to write to him, and to hear from him, and have any and every intercourse with him that was possible. If she were informed that her husband was going to send a ship for her, and that it was even on the way, although not accustomed to the sea, and very timorous, she would conquer her reluctance, and venture on board to get near to her husband, the object of her dearest, her most affectionate love. Or if she understood that her husband had transacted the business for which he went away, and, having obtained an estate, or a kingdom, in that distant country, was now returning to fetch her to partake with him in the enjoyment of it, she would not be sorry, on this account, unless she had been an adulteress in his absence, but would rejoice at the thought of his coming, and bid him a most hearty welcome on his arrival.

Now to apply all these observations particularly to the case in hand. "Lovest thou me?" If so.—Thou thinkest and speakest much of me.—Thou takest pleasure in hearing of my honour and exaltation; that I am "highly exalted, and have a name above every name;" that "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," and that I am constituted "the head over all to the Church." (Matt. xxviii. 18; Phil. ii. 9, 10; Eph. i. 22, 23.)—Thou art concerned for my honour and interest in the world, and wilt endeavour to promote it. "Feed my lambs;" "feed my sheep." (Ver.

15—17.)—Thou wilt keep my charge; (John xiv. 15; xv. 10, 14; Matt. xxviii 20;) wilt “observe all things that I have commanded thee,” and sooner die than sin again-t me. (Rev. xii. 11.)—Thou art faithful in my absence; loyal to me as a king, having no other lords; faithful to me as a husband, having no other lovers.—Thou art dutiful in thy regard to the vicegerent I have left in my place, viz, the Holy Spirit, and wilt not leave, much less quench, or do despite to, him.—Thou wilt show respect and kindness to my friends and relations, for my sake. It is a very acceptable mark of affection to a friend, who is himself, absent, to do acts of kindness to any of his kindred and other friends, with whom we have intercourse. Thus we must respect the people of Christ in general, and do good to the poor of them in particular. (John xii. 8; Matt. xxv. 40.)—Thou wilt rejoice to let me hear from thee in the exercise of prayer and praise, and to read and consider the letters I have sent to thee; to receive the communications I make, and the pledges I send thee of my love, particularly the Lord’s Supper, and to go to the places where I have appointed to meet and bless thee.—Nor wilt thou be sorry to hear I am about to send the ship of death for thee.—Or, that having “prepared a place for thee,” I am about to “come again,” with power and great glory, and to “receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.” (John xiv. 2, 3) — —

The question does not relate to the *past*, but the *present* experience. “*Lovest* thou?” Dost thou *now* love me? — —

It does not belong to thy neighbours chiefly, or only, but especially to thyself. “Simon son of Jonas,” calling him by name, “lovest *thou* me?” — —

Again “lovest thou *me*?” I doubt not that thou dost, and canst, and wilt love, as thou hast loved some object or other from a child; but “lovest thou *me*?”—

But who art thou that askest me this question? Why must I love thee? what is there so lovely, or loving, or honourable, or profitable, or delightful, in thee? This leads me to consider,

III. THE FOUNDATION OF THE INQUIRY, OR WHY WE MUST LOVE HIM.

Why must we love him?—Because of his transcendent excellencies; as the Son of God, possessing all possible perfections, being the first good, and, as the Son of Man, possessing more wisdom, holiness, and goodness, more of the divine image, than any other creature. Every divine principle and grace, every excellent and heavenly affection, an entire devotedness to God, and undeviating conformity to his holy will, in thought, desire, purpose and deed, were the prominent features of him, who requires our love, and commands us to follow him. With whom shall he be compared? He is “fairer than the children of men.” (Psal. xlv. 2.)

“Whate’er of beauty in his ample round
The sun surveys, in thee is brighter found
Whate’er the skies, in all their splendid cost,
Their beamy pride, and majesty, can boast;
Whate’er the restless mind of man desires;
Whate’er an angel’s vaster thought admires;
In thee tis found in its unchanging height,—
Thou first great Spring of beauty and delight!”

—Because he is nearly related to us as our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, our Kinsman, Brother, and Husband.—Because of his infinite love to us (Eph. iii. 19.)—Because of the unequivocal, ample, and astonishing proofs he has given of his love, in what he has done and suffered, and is still doing.—Because of the offices he bears, and the characters he sustains, on our account, in all of which we absolutely want him, he being our *only* Saviour.—Because of the many and incomparable blessings which he hath procured for us, and which are absolutely needful for us.—Because of the infinite freeness and liberality wherewith he offers and communicates his blessings to all that come to him.—Because of the exalted honours which have been done him by God, angels and men.—Because of his unlimited power and authority.—Because of his unsearchable riches.—Because in all these he invites us to share with him.—Because he is our impartial Judge, and our final sentence and eternal state depends upon him.

CXVIII.

THE GENERAL CAUSES OF HUMAN MISERY.

ACTS III. 26.

Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

(FIRST SERMON.)

As the Jews were the children of the Patriarchs with whom the covenant was first made, and they had the Oracles of God committed to them, wherein that covenant and its privileges were recorded, it was proper that they should have the blessings of the Gospel first offered to them. As they also had imbrued their hands in the precious blood of Jesus, such a proposal being first made to them, would afford an instance of unparalleled mercy for the encouragement of the most abandoned sinners to expect forgiveness through Christ, on their repentance; "Unto them first," therefore, "God having raised up his Son Jesus," and appointed him to be a Prince and a Saviour, "sent him" in his preached Gospel, "to bless them." But on their national rejection of him, he was offered to the Gentiles, that, according to ancient prophecy, "though Israel were not gathered," as his disciples and subjects, yet he might "be glorious in the eyes of the Lord," by becoming the great and efficient source of all spiritual

blessings to those who should believe in him from among all nations. (Isai xlix. 5, 6.)

Christ blesses men in various ways.—As a Prophet, by publishing the glad tidings of salvation, and showing us the way to blessedness.—As a Priest, by purchasing blessings for us, and interceding on our behalf that we may receive them.—As a King, by conferring them upon us, and making us happy in the enjoyment of them. It is in this last point of view we shall now chiefly consider Christ as conferring blessings on mankind.

Daily observation testifies that many people, especially the young and healthy, though satisfied of their obligations to become truly religious, and of the connection of true religion with their eternal happiness, are yet deterred from the immediate practice of it, by the idea that some present unhappiness will attend it. Having no notion of any other happiness than what arises from the gratification of their senses, appetites, or passions, the possession of earthly honours, riches, or the enjoyment of social delights; and taking it for granted, and that with reason, that religion will lay them under restraint in these particulars, without affording any adequate recompense, they conclude their happiness must be proportionably abridged, as they become really devoted to God. And it is easy to see what an obstacle would be removed, could they be convinced that they are under a double mistake, as well in imagining that happiness can be found in the things wherein they place it, as that religion has not peculiar joys of its own, real, satisfactory, and durable, and sufficient to compensate for the want of every thing beside.

It is indeed desirable people should be influenced by

nobler motives in entering upon a Christian life, than merely a view to their own happiness. But this is not generally to be expected in the commencement of a religious course. And if it were, we need not reject the aid of this consideration. Our Lord and his Apostles often send us to the joys of heaven, or the torments of hell, for inducements to turn from our evil ways, and continue steadfast in the faith of Christ, that so iniquity may not be our ruin, but we may possess the crown of life. Nay, they frequently call us to reflect on the present misery of sin, and the present peace and satisfaction attending on the service of God, that we may make religion our immediate care, and sin the object of our strongest aversion.

In order to set this subject in a clear point of view, we shall consider,

I. WHAT THE GENERAL CAUSES OF OUR MISERY ARE; AND THE INSUFFICIENCY OF THE THINGS TO WHICH WE COMMONLY RESORT TO AFFORD US RELIEF.

II. THE SUFFICIENCY OF TRUE RELIGION FOR THIS PURPOSE; SAVING US, AS IT DOES, FROM OUR INIQUITIES, THE ORIGINAL CAUSES OF OUR MISERY.

I. WHAT THE GENERAL CAUSES OF OUR MISERY ARE, &c.

Though, properly speaking, the soul is the only seat of misery, or happiness, being the only part which is sensible of either, yet, since there are several miseries which belong to us, in consequence of our connection with the body, and others which are common to us with

evil spirits, I shall consider them. first, as they concern our outward, and then as they respect our inward part. Both our bodies and our souls are liable to misery from the want of what is requisite to their well being, as also from disorder in their constitution.

The body of man, in his present state, placed in a material world, has need of food to nourish it, and raiment to cover it. Delicate food, or elegant and expensive apparel, is not required, but such as is wholesome and decent, and such as the earth affords in great abundance for us all. And the want of either must disorder our body, as much as the taking an undue degree or improper kind. Gluttony, drunkenness, and luxury, have these disorders, which are more numerous, lasting, and severe, than those occasioned by the contrary causes. It is said, that no chronical diseases are hereditary, but that they derive their origin from intemperance, indolence, or vexation. How many acute and lingering diseases have arisen from hence! No sex, age, or condition, is exempt from afflictions which may be traced to these sources. But there are various diseases, which must be attributed to other causes, and cannot be prevented by the strictest temperance, the most equal temper, and regular method of life. The seeds of sickness and death are sown in every constitution. The most wholesome food poisons while it nourishes. The surrounding air is replete with baleful principles, which we imbibe with our breath, and which will not fail to distress us at one time or other, and hasten our death. To this the poet alludes, when he says,

“Each changing season does its sickness bring;
Rheums chill the winter, agues blast the spring;

Wet, dry, cold, hot, at their appointed hour,
 All act subservient to the Almighty's power,
 And, if obedient nature knows his will,
 A fly, a grapestone, or a hair, can kill."

Were this all, human life is a condition hardly to be desired! But alas! a darker scene is still behind. "The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov xviii 14.) Our greatest miseries are those to which we are liable independent of the body; and they may be considered as they refer to our spiritual wants and disorders.

The soul has its wants equally with the body, and is liable to disorder if they are not supplied. "The bread of life," the Spirit of God, filling the soul with love, and joy, and peace, is its proper food; the image of God, righteousness and true holiness, is its proper clothing. These are necessary to its well being, and, if destitute of them, it languishes and dies; and here there is no danger from intemperance. The soul cannot feast with excess on divine grace, or be too richly attired in true holiness; and, if either be neglected, it must proportionably suffer. But which of us have not neglected both, and are not suffering on that account, in all our powers and faculties? The understanding, conscience, will, affections, tempers, in their natural state, are all springs of uneasiness, and unite to overwhelm mankind in misery.

The *understanding* covered with thick darkness, is unable to direct us to rest and peace. Blinded by prejudice and error, it is insufficient to guide us in safety or comfort, amidst the dangers that surround us in this wilderness. If we trust to it, and attempt to follow its direction, we are soon convinced of the folly of our

rash confidence, when we perceive our hope swallowed up in despondency, our peace ruined by pride, and our happiness destroyed by many restless and domineering passions, as anger and jealousy, envy and malice. If, conscious of its incapacity and suspicious of evil, we refuse obedience to its dictates, still we are perplexed with doubt, and harassed with fears. Sensible that we are in danger of being consumed by the fiery wrath of an adverse heaven, or of being enticed or driven by the enemies of our souls into vice, and thrown into the pit of eternal misery, we know not where to go for protection. Sensible we ought to walk in the way of salvation, and run the race of duty and patient suffering, yet we cannot find that way, or tell with certainty the path in which we should run. Sensible we are in circumstances the most deplorable, and under an absolute necessity of escaping somewhere, we know not whither to flee, or from what quarter to expect relief. Surely, then, our case, even on this account, is wretched.—But further,

The *conscience* has also distresses peculiarly its own. It is true, in too many it is asleep, if not quite dead; in which case it creates no alarm; excites no accusations on account of guilt, no forebodings of just retribution. And this, not because it has nothing whereof to accuse. Certainly not. “All have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God.” Much less is it because it is “sprinkled from evil,” with the atoning blood of Christ. But the reason is, because sin has stupified it, and deprived it of life, and it has not yet been awakened, or revived again. But when new life and sensibility are given to it by the Spirit of God, it will be heard, and will pierce the wounded

spirit with the keenest anguish. This misery many have experienced, as we find in the Old Testament. This made Hezekiah complain, (Isai. xxxviii. 14,) "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward; O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." And David's distress appears to have arisen from the same cause, when he confessed, (Psal cxvi. 3, 4,) "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." This was the "horrible pit and miry clay" in which he was sticking, when he laments that "innumerable evils had compassed him about; his iniquities had taken hold upon him, so that he was not able to look up,—therefore, his heart failed him." And no wonder, for a guilty conscience is not easily pacified:—

"Who can appease its anguish? how it burns!
What hand the barb'd envenom'd dart can draw,
What healing hand can pour the balm of heaven,
And turn my sight undaunted on the tomb?"

It is ever attended with the fear of death, as the passage to that future and eternal misery it anticipates. It is the commencement of the knowing of that worm which will never die, and which, though it cause more exquisite torment hereafter, yet, even now, gives such pain, as to make many prefer death rather than life.

Another source of distress is in the *will*, which, in our fallen state, vainly opposes the holy will of God. This appears in our disobedience to the Divine commands, and impatience under providential sufferings.

The Almighty pronounces his commands, and enforces them by promises the most glorious, and threatenings the most awful; but we despise his goodness, and disregard his wrath. We imitate Israel of old, who, when the Lord himself commanded them to "ask for the old paths, and walk therein," and they should find "rest to their souls," replied, "We will not walk therein;" and the language of our hearts is, like that of Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord."—Like a "bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," we fret and are discontented under sufferings, and give proof of our opposition to the holy will of God, by thwarting his designs respecting us. Hence he sees it needful to correct us, but, like froward children, we refuse to receive correction. Whatever afflictions he appoints for our trial and improvement, through our perverseness, fail to answer their intended end. And now, "Why should we be stricken any more; we shall revolt more and more; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint." Sick, indeed, is our head; for how unreasonable it is to oppose his will who has so undoubted a right to dispose of us as he pleases, and to "do what he wills with his own;" nor is it less foolish and vain, for who can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? "The whole heart is faint," and such it must be in this unequal contest. Let "the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth, but miserable is the man that fights with God." The Almighty prevails; our hands hang down; our knees wax feeble; our heart sinks within us; we languish and die. We are "consumed by the stroke of God's hand, and our moisture is turned into the drought of summer." Man is fro-

ward, he murmurs and repines, but, like a wild bull in a net, it is to no purpose; God holds him fast, and he wearies himself with very vanity. And now say if this is not a miserable condition; if the heart, thus disposed, is not to be denominated wretched. Surely a stream of misery, impetuous, wide, and deep, flows from the fountain of a perverse will.

But, again; What shall we say of the *passions*? Is there nothing in them worthy of blame? Are they all regular and fixed upon their proper objects? Far from it; “Set your affections on things above,” says the divine Apostle. But we reverse that precept, and set our affections, too frequently, on things beneath. The world has our hearts; its riches, honours, and pleasures are the trinity we worship; these we value and esteem; love and desire; these flush our hopes, kindle our joy, engross our care, excite our endeavours; about these the passions of every unregenerate man are tumultuously busied from day to day. And, let me ask, Are these things productive of happiness? That they are not, appears from the inseparable properties which belong to things in this world. They are not calculated to satisfy, and, therefore, our expectations of satisfaction from them must be frustrated; and the more sanguine these are, the greater must be our disappointment. But supposing they did yield us satisfaction yet they are in their nature transitory; hence we must be distressed with anxious cares about keeping them, and vexatious fears of losing them, and if we really lose them, which, as they are all of short duration, may be soon the case, we shall be oppressed with a proportionable sorrow. In short, our passions must be sources of extreme misery, while in our fallen

state, for we love the objects which are incapable of making us any return, we desire what we cannot obtain, or what, if we do obtain, will not afford content. We hope, without having any solid foundation for our hope; and hence we perpetually meet with disappointment. We rejoice in the possession of things transitory and fading, and which we must soon relinquish. We hate and abhor many things which it is not in our power to avoid; we fear that against which we have no security, nay, that which must infallibly befall us, and are overwhelmed with sorrow on account of real or supposed evil, from which we are not able to extricate ourselves; and, to conclude all, we are shut up in the strong castle of despair, and have every door bolted on our hopeless fate. What tongue can express the vast quantity of disquietude which continually flows, through these many channels, into the ocean of human misery.

“Deep troubles toss,
Loud sorrows howl, evenom’d passions bite,
Ravenous calamities our vitals seize,
And threatening fate wide opens to devour.”

Once more. Let us see if our *temper*s are as they should be, and can be characterized as happy. *Alas!* very little reflection will be sufficient to convince us that pride, not humility; anger, not meekness; malice and envy, not a tender disinterested benevolence, are the productions of the natural heart. Far are we from considering the example of St. Paul, or from following the advice of that eminently great and holy man, who represented himself as “the chief of sinners,” (1 Tim. i. 15,) and “less than the least of all saints;” (Eph. iii. 8;) and who advises us to “think soberly” of ourselves.

and "in lowliness of mind to esteem others better than ourselves." (Rom. xii. 3; Phil. ii. 3.) But the generality, in direct contradiction to this Apostle, think extravagantly of themselves, and in despite of reason, Scripture, and experience, decide that they are hardly to be called sinners, and perhaps, without the least pretension to holiness, rank themselves among the most exemplary characters. They are proud, and, if conscious of various sins and infirmities, do not own them, or acknowledge their obligations to God for any natural endowments they may possess. Hence their unreasonable demand for praise, and their restless pursuit of human applause,—an empty, fleeting shadow, which, if they are able to catch, they find to be like air, eluding their embrace, and leaving them a prey to mortification and disquiet. Not to mention that pride is an abomination to the Lord, who will not fail to resist it, as it is also disagreeable to mankind, who, however subject to the same temper, always take pleasure in humbling the proud, and stripping it of its borrowed plumes.

A natural consequence of pride is anger, to which all are more or less subject, and which manifests itself in a thousand instances. The occasions of it are real or imaginary affronts, which, in various ways, fail not to occur almost every day. Through ignorance and pride we often feel offended, when really no offence is meant; and such is the malice and wickedness of men, that we cannot avoid meeting with numberless affronts, which, through our natural corruption, become incentives to anger; implying an uneasiness of mind, attended with a desire of revenge. Unhappiness is,

therefore, included in its very definition; he that is angry is unhappy himself; and it is his endeavour to make others so also. Dissatisfied in his own mind, he only breathes threatenings and slaughter towards the objects of his resentment. His heart is inwardly rent and torn asunder by the fiend that possesses it, while the blush, or pallid hue, upon his countenance, discovers to all, the tumult and disorder which rage in his breast. Unhappy man! How does the fury domineer over him, and sway every faculty of his soul and body! It has blinded the eyes of his understanding, dethroned his reason, stupified his conscience, and caused him to commit the reins of government to his passions; and these hurry him hither and thither at their pleasure, and prompt him to spread desolation and destruction, as far as he has power, on every side; or to make such, at least, as oppose his purposes, feel the effects of his resentment.

Nearly allied to this are malice and envy. These are dispositions directly opposite to that tender and disinterested benevolence which sincerely desires the happiness of all, and endeavours in every possible way to promote it, rejoicing in the prosperity of others, and grieving at their adversity, and which would possess our minds, if we retained our primitive rectitude. Instead of this, it is not uncommon for us to indulge the natural enmity of our hearts, and to desire the hurt rather than the happiness of others; to rejoice in their adversity, and to regret their prosperity. How often do we think, and even act unkindly to others. Instead of making the best apology that we can for any evil that appears in another, how often do we suspect evil where none appears! and instead of hoping the best for the

time to come, how prone are we to hope the worst. Hence, we find pleasure in censuring and slandering the characters of absent persons, and, by destroying their reputation, show that we would do the same with their persons and estates had we power. Surely Satan whose name is enmity itself, is the parent of these dispositions! for the God of love has nothing to do with them; except that he will not fail to punish them. Punish them? Alas! they are their own punishment. Misery is stamped on their every feature. It is the nature of these unhappy tempers to minister to our afflictions out of those very sources from whence benevolence would extract joy and consolation. God's goodness to others, through their baleful influence, instead of affording matter for praise and satisfaction, becomes a perpetual occasion of murmuring and complaint. "Their eye is evil because God is good." Miserable creatures! Their inward grief has already made their "beauty to consume away, like as when a moth fretteth a garment." Their face has contracted a livid paleness; their body is emaciated; their strength enfeebled, and their hearts faint; and why is this? why? because a neighbour, by whose kindness perhaps, they have been relieved again and again, has been blessed of late by Providence, and his affairs are in a flourishing condition. And is this all? How can this injure them? Not at all. But they cannot endure to see their neighbour in greater prosperity than themselves. Ah sin! what hast thou done! It might be supposed, humanity was incapable of displaying such devilish dispositions, did not daily experience afford sufficient demonstration of it.—If the last mentioned tempers do

not proceed in all to equal lengths, this can only be attributed to God's preventing grace.

Who can help shedding the tear of pity over the human race, thus "dead in trespasses and sins;" thus buried under the ruins of the fall! How wretched is apostate man! how deplorable his condition even in this world! how far gone from original righteousness and happiness! But what is still more lamentable, how many are unwilling to part with their misery and sin; and to partake of the salvation God has provided for them! Numbers remain thus wretched while on earth, die thus wretched, and are wretched for ever in hell. They continue disordered in mind and body, till death directs his dagger at them, separates their mortal and immortal part; lays their body in the silent grave, and sends their soul into the world of spirits, ever to bewail, without hope and without help, their rejection of the remedy Christ had prepared for and offered to them. There these evil tempers, malice, envy, anger, pride, uncured, will eternally sting and torment them. Their evil passions unsubdued while they were on earth, will there agitate them without cessation. Like conflicting elements, they will rend and tear them in pieces, by their contrary efforts; while their conscience will continually upbraid them with their disobedience to the best of parents, whose every command tended to their happiness; their ingratitude to the most bountiful of benefactors; their treachery to the kindest of friends; their unfaithfulness to the most faithful of husbands! In hell "their worm dieth not," but for ever gnaws upon their vitals. Their reason is now enabled to weigh things in an impartial scale, and, balancing their loss with their gain, they will ever reproach themselves with

the folly of their conduct. They will then discern, to their everlasting sorrow, in the clearest manner, the blessings they have forfeited, and the misery they have incurred; blessings dearly purchased with the precious blood of God's most beloved Son; blessings freely offered, which they were invited, desired, entreated, nay, pressed, and commanded to accept.— Their memory will be sufficiently strengthened to recollect the many calls and warnings they have had from God, that they might escape that place of torment. They will now see how they were driven by threatenings, drawn by promises, forced by apparent anger, and allured by fervent love; how they were corrected in justice, and comforted in mercy; how pain was sent upon pain, to remind them of the pains of hell; and blessing upon blessing, to teach them how they might be inconceivably blessed in heaven! And yet all this display of divine goodness and mercy was thrown away upon them. They “despised the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, and after their hardness and impenitent heart treasured up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous indignation of God.” But this is not all; their senses which were made instruments of sin on earth, shall hereafter also be instruments of punishment. The gloom of hell, their dismal abode, dark as it may be, will yet afford light enough whereby to discern forms, hideous and frightful, beyond all comparison; sounds doleful and terrifying from all sides, shall shock their ears, and thrill through their soul! They will agonize at every pore when the flames kindle upon them, and the unquenchable fire devours all their mem-

bers; while they drink in the liquid streams, and taste perpetually what is altogether nauseous and loathsome! In short,

“Then all the powers Heaven gave them to supply
Their souls with pleasure, and bring in their joy,
Rise up in arms against them, join the foe;
Sense, reason, memory, increase their woe;
And then, their voice, ordain’d on hymns to dwell,
Corrupts to groans, and blows the flames of hell;
Then must they look with terror on their gain,
And by existence only measure pain.”

Now view the whole, and say, whether “man is not born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;” whether the inspired penmen have not rightly declared, “destruction and misery are in our ways, and the way of peace we have not known?” and whether from hence they have not justly concluded, that “all have sinned,” and are “by nature children of wrath?” Sin is certainly the fountain of our misery. It has brought all this upon us, has poured forth the streams of corruption, and deluged the world with misery. This enemy hath done the mischief; has beguiled mankind with soothing promises and delusive hopes, and, having allured them into his snares, and then surrounded them with ignorance and error, guilt and fear, perplexity and distress, has opened the sluices of heaven, and rained down the divine indignation upon them. Sin has sent us fiends and furies to torment us, while it has exposed us to the arrows of divine vengeance and the sword of God’s justice, whereby we are deservedly punished, because we hearkened to the enchantress, though solemnly warned against her. Woe to the world because of sin! What heart is there, however bold, but sickens at the sight of human life, viewed as it really is! Surely he

is infatuated who is fond of it, and far more he who trifles it away in folly, instead of applying it to, and following the advice of the Physician of souls, till death comes, and he is pronounced for ever incurable.

Who this Physician is, and what is the advice he gives, will be a subject of future inquiry; and we shall now briefly point out THE INSUFFICIENCY OF THE MEANS COMMONLY RESORTED TO. These are various, and differ according to the different circumstances in which men find themselves. Under bodily disorders men generally apply for the advice of physicians, and seek help from medicine, and in many cases, through the blessing of God. relief is thus afforded. But it is equally certain that in numerous other cases, no good is obtained in this way. And in those cases in which relief is afforded, it is only for a time; the same disease, or some other, returns upon us with double violence, and notwithstanding the utmost efforts of medicine, at length prevails pulls down our frail tabernacle, and lays it in the dust.

In the disorders of the mind, very different means are applied to for relief. Those who are, in a measure, sensible of the darkness which has overspread their understanding and their ignorance in consequence thereof, apply to men and books, to contemplation and reflection. Nor are these means altogether useless. On the contrary, they are means of God's appointment, and ought to be used by all who would "know the truth, that the truth may make them free." But they may be used in a right or a wrong way, and accordingly prove advantageous or otherwise. A man may use them barely *as means*, renouncing all dependance on them, convinced they cannot profit him without the

influence of God's Spirit, and waiting upon God in constant prayer to obtain it, and then he uses them aright, and will not fail to reap abundant advantage. Or, he may entirely depend upon them, as in themselves sufficient to enlighten him, may neglect prayer to the Father of lights, and then he uses them wrong, and will be more and more blinded and hardened. A little acquaintance with the world will convince us, that this is the very way in which the generality use these means, and, therefore, continue all their life in that state of blindness, in which they are by nature.

Again. They whose consciences are, in some degree, awakened to see the great evil of sin, the guilt they have contracted, and the punishment they have deserved, and must infallibly experience, if not pardoned, generally flee to their own works to procure their pardon and reconciliation with God. They begin to read, to pray, to partake of the Holy Communion; they abstain from vice of every kind, and perform a few charitable actions; they strive to watch and toil, and hence hope to obtain the pardon of sin, and the favour of God. Now it would be very unscriptural to assert that one convinced of sin should do nothing of all this; but it is equally unscriptural to maintain, that by this proceeding we can merit the smallest favour with God, much less the forgiveness of former sins, and an interest in his love. It is impossible that we should make any, the least recompense for our rebellion against the Majesty of heaven. Nay, so far are we from being able to do this, that, till we partake of his favour, and are reconciled to him, we do nothing but add sin to sin, every day and every hour. So far are we from removing our past guilt, or from deserving any mitiga-

tion of the punishment already incurred, that we continually contract fresh guilt, and merit increased condemnation. Vain then is the expectation of relieving our conscience, by any thing we can do, however specious.

With respect to a rebellious will, evil tempers, and irregular passions, though all must feel misery and inquietude in whom they exist; yet the generality are by no means sensible of the causes, of their distress, and consequently, are not desirous to be delivered from them; but being unhappy on these grounds they apply, almost universally, as in the case of a guilty conscience before mentioned, to the pleasures and diversions of the age. They give themselves up to sensual delights, and so endeavour to drown their convictions, and relieve their trouble of mind. They call in the aid of horses and hounds: they build houses, and plant gardens, furnish their apartments elegantly, and decorate their bodies. Clothed in the finest silks, and adorned with the most costly jewels, they expose themselves to view for admiration at the levee, or in the assembly-room. There the most celebrated musicians, with all the instruments of their art, breathe the softest airs to allay their trouble, and banish their distress. There they dance and run a thousand different rounds; they put themselves into unnatural, and, perhaps, indecent attitudes, and perform a multiplicity of strange and fanciful evolutions. When tired of this, they toss some painted pieces of paper, and throw figured pieces of square wood, either to divert their own minds, or by this art beguile their friends of some gold and silver. They read novels and romances, attend plays, disguise their faces, and exchange their dress, that they may

appear at the masquerade as inhabitants of a foreign land, of a contrary sex, or even a different order of beings. In short, they exhaust nature, and fatigue invention, to procure for themselves some diversion and thereby some relief, from their painful reflections and inward grief. But alas, these return with new force, and like a current of water, impeded for a time, again break out with redoubled violence, overflow their souls, and plunge them in the deepest distress.

But suppose they are made justly sensible of the causes of their misery, and desire to be delivered from it; they too often resort to improper methods of relief. They lean chiefly to their own understanding, and trust to their own strength. They strive and labour to overcome their corruptions; "the law in their members warring against the law of their mind, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin." They use every means which they can think of, and try every probable method; but all in vain; their passions still domineer; their appetites still prevail over them, their tempers still oppose the Divine will, and their own tranquility. They still sin, and are still unhappy. And now it is well if they do not sit down in despair, and consider their case incurable. It is well indeed if "weary and heavy laden" they will consent to "come to Christ," that after being long tossed to and fro, they may "find rest to their souls" (Matt. xi. 28.)

Such are the methods used by most men to be freed from their various disorders. But they are all ineffectual; they do not, and cannot answer their intended end; and miserable must be the case of those who depend upon them. They must expect nothing but disappointment, and increasing sorrow in this world,

and everlasting affliction in the next. Deliverance or relief they cannot obtain till they apply to the Physician recommended in the Gospel, and use the method he prescribes to them.

I would appeal to your consciences for the truth of what I have been maintaining. You have all, at one time or other, felt indisposition of body. Disease and pain you, in general, are well acquainted with, and whatever relief you may obtain from other sources, no art or skill can exempt you from the common lot of humanity. And how can you think of dying while disordered in your soul, and consequently subject to endless misery? And are you not disordered in every faculty of mind and heart? Your conscience tells you this has been, or is the case; nor can you live comfortably while this is your state. But if you thus could weather out the storms of life, you cannot so dare to die? Surely not.—Perhaps you are convinced of your disorders. What method, then, will you try for relief? What shall make you happy in this world, or the next? Can books, or men, or refection, dispel those clouds of darkness which hover on your mind? Can these direct you to holiness and happiness, to God and heaven? Can your own works, or sufferings, or piety, or all these together, recommend you to God? or atone for your complicated guilt? Surely you know better than to imagine this. Your best actions need an atonement; and can they make amends for your greater and more glaring offences? And how will you do with your unruly affections, your stubborn will, and diabolical tempers? What shall comfort you under their influence? Shall any worldly pleasure and secular pursuits? Alas! what can these do for you? these all, as it were, say,

“Happiness is not in me.” Your own experience has long taught you this. You must, however, be delivered from your disorders: but in what way? Can you save yourselves? Are your own wisdom and power sufficient? Have you not already tried? and have you delivered yourselves at all? You know you have not. The methods you have taken have been unavailing. Are you sensible of this? and, despairing of all human help, and human resources, do you look for, and long after him, “whom God has sent to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities?” If so, you are in the way to the desired end, and, for your direction, I shall endeavour, in another discourse, to show, that the Gospel salvation is sufficient to relieve our misery, and to make us truly happy.

CXIX.

RELIGION THE ONLY SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

ACTS III. 26.

Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

(SECOND SERMON.)

THE principal and ultimate end, for which Christ came into the world, was to make mankind happy; to advance his own glory by the present and eternal happiness of the children of men. He could have

advanced it in their destruction, which was in justice due to them, but he chose rather to do it in their salvation, or, as it is expressed in the text, by “blessing them.” Now he could not bless them without “turning them away from their iniquities,” which therefore, was necessary to be first done, in order to accomplish the more remote and ultimate end he had in view. We have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Hence the corruption of our whole nature; the depravation of all our powers and faculties. Hence the darkness of our understanding, the perverseness of our will, and the irregularity of our affections. Hence our tempers are hateful and diabolical, and our conscience is guilty and defiled. For by sin we have offended God, forfeited his favour, and incurred his displeasure. He, therefore, has withdrawn himself from us; his light and love; his teaching, sanctifying, and comforting Spirit. “Our iniquities have separated between us and our God,” and “our sins have hid his face from us:” and we are left to mourn his absence in a state of darkness, corruption, and misery. The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, undertakes by removing our sin to heal our diseases, and take away our misery. And to effect this, he restores to us his Father’s favour and presence; and confers upon us the Spirit in his various influences. Thus the cause being removed, the effect ceases; the fountain of our distress being dried up, the streams issuing from it are no more.

Having, in a preceding discourse, endeavoured to point out the true sources of all human wretchedness, in the disorders which sin has introduced into our nature, and the inefficiency of the means to which most men resort for relief, I now propose to consider,

II. THE SUFFICIENCY OF TRUE RELIGION FOR THIS PURPOSE; SAVING US, AS IT DOES, FROM OUR INIQUITIES, THE ORIGINAL CAUSES OF ALL OUR COMPLAINTS.

In prosecuting this design, I shall proceed in that method which is most natural, though somewhat different from that before observed. I began in the former part of my subject, with the miseries of the body, but shall now speak, first, of those peculiar to the soul, since our Lord certainly first remedies these.

The soul has its wants, as well as the body, of which, however, we are naturally unconscious, but from which its disorders arise. Now our Lord makes it sensible of these wants, and of its misery till they are supplied. He causes it to feel hunger, that it may apply to him to be fed, and discovers its nakedness that it may apply to him to be clothed. I mean, he makes it sensible that it is destitute of God's favour and image, because destitute of his Spirit; that it is under his wrath and curse, and exposed to his eternal indignation; that hence it is wretched already, and in danger of being so everlastingly; that it has no wisdom, no power whereby, of itself, to retrieve God's favour and image, or to escape his wrath and curse. He further shows it the virtue of his blood, that it "cleanseth from all sin;" the value of his merits, that they infallibly recommend to the Divine favour; the sufficiency of his Spirit, to heal all the disorders of the soul, to feed and nourish it unto life eternal, to restore it to the image of God, and to clothe it with righteousness and true holiness. Hence the soul looks from itself to Jesus; it ceases to trust in and depend upon itself, that it may

trust in Jesus, and depend upon him. It applies to him with earnest desire, watchful expectation, and lively faith. It follows hard after him, lays hold on him who is its "righteousness, mighty to save," and willingly resigns itself and all its concerns into his hands. It relies upon him for a present and eternal salvation, and is fully persuaded, that "believing in him, it never shall be confounded," "shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life."

"By grace are ye saved, through faith," says the Apostle. Believers are already saved; "They which be of faith *are blessed* with faithful Abraham." They are already made happy in that they are saved from the guilt of sin, and its consequences. For to Jesus Christ "give all the prophets witness, that whosoever believeth on him doth receive the forgiveness of sins." Such was the experience of the Ephesians, of whom St. Paul declares, that they "had redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins;" and surely they had, if only *babes* in Christ; for, says St. John, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you, for his name's sake;" hence St. Paul also declares, "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." God no longer condemns them; he is not resolved to punish them, but, on the contrary, he is resolved not to do it. For he has taken them into his favour, and "made them accepted in the Beloved." They "are children of God by faith in Christ," and, "because they are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Now this same Spirit which they have received by faith, gives them an aversion to that which is evil, and an

inclination to that which is good. It also "helpeth their infirmities," and enables them to "walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless." Their conscience, therefore, does not condemn them for past sins, for by the blood of Christ these are blotted out; nor for present sins, for these "have not dominion over them;" and as to their habitual conversation, they "live in all good conscience before God," and "their rejoicing is this, the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have their conversation in the world." With regard to their present failings, infirmities, and various deficiencies, which are more than enough to condemn them, since they are breaches of the holy law of God; from these they are continually acquitted by their faith in Christ Jesus. Thus are they saved from the evil of a guilty conscience, and from all the distress flowing therefrom; namely, the fear of death, as an inlet to hell, the fear of Satan, and the deserved wrath of God; and all fear that hath torment. Nay, the conscience being thus healed, affords the sinner just occasion of joy; as is suggested by St Paul, in the words just before quoted. It is matter of joy to them that they are not conscious of any thing whereby they wilfully dishonour God, transgress his law, or cause him to hide his face from them, and a just ground it is for self-congratulation. Even the poor heathen were enabled partially to appreciate this happiness, and could deliver the precept,—

"B. this thy brazen bulwark of defence,
Still to preserve thy conscious innocence,
Nor to turn pale with guilt."*

* "Hic murus æneus esto
Nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa."—*Hon. Lib. 1. Ep. 1. l. 60*

But it is still further cause of joy, that they are conscious they walk “in simplicity and godly sincerity,” and “as becometh the Gospel of Christ,” that “they please God,” that he accepts them, and, for the sake of his Son, approves of them. And surely this must afford unspeakable satisfaction to be assured, that however men censure and condemn them, God approves and acquits them. To know they are in the favour of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Creator, Upholder, and Disposer of all, whose wisdom, power, and goodness are equally infinite, who “does whatsoever he pleases in heaven and in earth,” whose “hand none can stay,” who is the rightful owner of all things, and “God over all, blessed for ever;” to know they are in *his* favour, I say, must be a never-failing source of joy, to which no earthly joys can bear any proportion. Enjoying his favour they may rest assured of protection in danger, of supplies in want, of relief from trouble, of “grace to help in every time of need,” and all things necessary for life and godliness. Who or what can harm them whom infinite power protects? How can they err whom infinite wisdom teaches, or they be wretched whom infinite love comforts? Well may we say with the Psalmist, “Blessed are the people that are in such a case, yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God.”

But this is not all; they are not only the favourites, but also the children of the Most High God. How unspeakably honourable this relation! And how advantageous! Whatever the greatest earthly parent can do for his children, that, and infinitely more, will God do for his. They shall not want any manner of thing that is good for them here. But what is this life? a

“vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” Not so the happiness of the sons of God. No: “if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” They are entitled to his kingdom, with all its glory and riches; nay, they are entitled to God himself, who is the portion of his people, and gives himself to be enjoyed by them to all eternity. Of this they are fully assured; for though “eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” yet he “hath revealed them” unto believers “by his Spirit.” And on this account, they “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Thus their conscience, naturally a source of inconceivable distress, when healed by the blood of Jesus, and the Spirit of our God, becomes a fountain of life, diffusing far and wide its salutary and refreshing streams, and collecting comfort from every quarter whence before it derived only apprehension and alarm; it flows with increasing pace, till we are conducted to the ocean of future and eternal joy.

To proceed. I before mentioned our *understanding*, as contributing to our misery, and must now show you how, when healed, it also contributes to our happiness. As soon as we believe in Jesus “with our heart unto righteousness,” the Spirit of Truth becomes our teacher, whose office it is to “guide us into all” necessary “truth,” and, especially, that which concerns our present and eternal salvation. God’s providence, Word, and Ministers, do not now teach in vain; but, aided by the Spirit, we learn to know ourselves, how sinful, guilty, and helpless we are; to know our God in all his Divine attributes; the nature and tendency of sin and

holiness; the only method of salvation; how we may escape sin and misery, and attain holiness and happiness; and on this account, our minds are no longer harassed with uncertainty about an affair of such importance, distressed with doubts or fears. We see our way plainly laid out, and rejoice to walk therein; a way which infallibly leads to peace and rest, to bliss and glory. The Spirit discovers the truth with such evidence that no room is left for any inward surmises, or heart misgivings concerning it; no distressing suspicions—"perhaps I may be mistaken and deluded,—perhaps my confidence may deceive me, and, expecting heaven, I may drop into hell."—We have no anxious cares about the way, while we sincerely and obediently follow the guidance of the Lord, who, by his Word, his Providence, and Spirit, has undertaken to conduct us through this desolate wilderness, till we reach the Canaan of eternal rest. This is not all. "Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." If this is true of natural, much more is it true of spiritual light. How unspeakable is our consolation, when "he who commandeth light to shine out of darkness, shines into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." Our hearts are ravished, while "with unveiled face, we behold as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord;" while we contemplate his Divine attributes, discovered in the works of creation, providence, and grace. What wisdom, what love, is here displayed! What power was employed to execute what his love purposed, and his wisdom contrived! What matter of admiration and astonishment, of ado-

ration and gratitude! How is all that is wonderful, great, rich, curious, or excellent, here concentrated! The earth beneath, the heaven above, the glorious worlds around, the providential dispensations of God from the beginning of time, but especially the life and death, person and offices, grace and glory of Christ Jesus, engage our attention, and supply us with matter of delightful reflection. "This," indeed, "is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." This constitutes the happiness of the saints in heaven. It is a principal benefit promised the pure in heart, that they "shall see God." They "shall see him as he is," shall know him without any intervening medium, and, therefore, shall be happy. They shall drink of the pure rivers of pleasure, which flow from the throne of God and the Lamb, shall contemplate his essence, and their souls shall be filled with heavenly consolation. If the saints then know the Lord Jesus and the Father in a small degree on earth, they must on earth possess a small degree of the happiness of heaven. Our happiness also bears an exact proportion to this knowledge. And the more our minds are acquainted with God, the more real enjoyment we possess. The understanding, therefore, being truly enlightened by the grace of God, contributes as much, or more, to our happiness, than it naturally does to our misery.

The same may be said of the *will*. This, by divine grace, is converted, and made to coincide with the will of God in all who truly believe in Jesus. By faith they receive the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in them, and, hereby, that carnal mind is removed which is enmity against God. "For," says St. Paul, "ye are not in the

flesh, “not carnally minded,” but in the Spirit. if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you.” This Spirit discovers to them “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God;” he shews them that his will is holy in its nature, and leads to all holiness; that it is just and reasonable in its demands, and ought to be embraced by all intelligent creatures; that it is good, and calculated to ensure the happiness of all who obey it. Hence, discovering the excellency and advantage of complying with the divine will, and the folly and misery of following their own, they cry out, “Not my will but thine be done.” They “hunger and thirst after righteousness;” that is, a conformity to the divine will. They find it their “meat and drink to do the will of their Father in heaven,” to obey his commandments, which “are not grievous.” For he is not a hard Master, “reaping where he hath not sown, and gathering where he hath not strawed.” Nay; “in keeping his commandments there is great reward;”—a *present* reward; for obedience creates immediate peace and satisfaction. “The work of righteousness is peace;” “great peace have they that love thy law.” And we are assured, “whatsoever we ask, we receive of God, because we keep his commandments;”—an *eternal* reward; for “blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city.” While we serve God according to the Gospel, we shall find nothing required of us, but what we shall receive strength, and, if faithful to the grace of God, inclination to perform, and hence we rejoice to “spend and be spent” for him; to do any thing for him who has done so much for us, to glorify him who has bought us with the price of his own blood, and to “show forth his

praises who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." Our joy is increased while we consider he is "not unrighteous to forget our work" of faith, "and labour of love," but that we shall be rewarded "according to our works," and if "by a patient continuance in well-doing we seek for glory, honour, and immortality," he will "render unto us eternal life," even that life which is the undeserved "*gift of God*," through Jesus Christ our Lord." Thus does our obedience to the divine commands administer to our happiness. And so also does our submission to the disposals of his Providence. By the teaching of his Spirit, we see his hand in all occurrences, ordering "all things well." As nothing can happen without his permission, whose wisdom and power are infinite, so he will permit nothing to happen which shall be hurtful to us, since his mercy and love are also infinite. "All things work together for good to them that love God." Does he afflict their bodies? He does not do so "willingly but for their profit, that they may be made partakers of his holiness." Does he bring them into disrepute among men, and suffer "their names to be cast out as evil?" He does so that they may be humbled; and, in consequence, more abundantly exalted hereafter, and be advanced in the favour and intimacy of that God, who promises to "dwell with the humble and contrite." Does he thwart them in their designs, disappoint their hopes of success in the world, and reduce them to poverty? It is in order, that being weaned from earth, they may choose the Lord only for their portion, and that, no longer "hewing out to themselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water," they may apply only "to the Fountain of living waters;" it is that, ceasing

to "lay up treasure on earth," they may be "rich towards God," "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised." Hence it is that convinced of all this, they can adopt the language of old Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." "Good is the will of the Lord, be it unto me even as thou wilt." They resign themselves to suffer whatever the Lord is pleased to lay upon them: and even "glory in tribulations; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope," hope of glory, yea, of more abundant glory. "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together;" that is, with a glory in proportion to our sufferings. What wonder then if the saints submit not only with resignation but with joy to those afflictions which "yield the peaceable, the glorious fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." But this is not all. The Lord Jesus endured pain and shame, that he might rescue them from sin and hell, that he might restore them to holiness and heaven, and shall they make him no returns of love? Shall they refuse to suffer any thing for him? Far from it. They "count not their lives dear unto them," when he demands them. They are ready, not only to suffer, but to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Yes,

"Had I a thousand lives my own,
At his command, with cheerful hand,
I'd pay the vital treasure down
In hourly tributes at his feet."

They are glad of any opportunity to testify their love to the Lord Jesus, by making any sacrifice to which they may be called for his sake. They "glory in the

cross of Christ," and rejoice if Christ be in any way magnified by them, whether it be by their sickness or health, poverty or riches, life or death. They "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." They rejoice in them as bearing witness to their sincerity and affection for the Son of God, as rendering them like the Man of Sorrows, as tending to make them partakers of God's holiness, and increasing their future felicity. Thus, it appears, that a will subject to that of God, is as subservient to our happiness as our naturally carnal will is to our misery.

Again. Our *passions* also undergo a change, when by faith we partake of the salvation of the Gospel. They are no longer set upon the world, and the things of it. The veil which formerly concealed its vain and transitory nature is now drawn aside, and we clearly see how incapable it is to administer satisfaction to the infinite desires of an immortal soul. Hence we no longer esteem it highly, or desire it eagerly. We do not hope for much happiness in it, or congratulate ourselves upon the acquisition of it. But our hearts are disengaged from it. We

"Loose from earth the grasp of fond desire,
Weigh anchor, and a happier clime explore."

In this way we are freed from all the bitterness of slighted love, ungratified desire, disappointed hope, and mistaken and short lived joy. Hence we are not immoderately distressed with care about acquiring and keeping, or with fears of losing, what are reputed the good things of this life; but we are enabled to rely upon his superintending providence, who "withholds no good thing from them that walk uprightly;" nor do

the reputed evils of the world render us miserable. We do not shrink from their approach; do not slavishly dread them when absent, or sorrow as without hope when they are present: but our passions being duly regulated, we abhor nothing so much as sin, desire nothing so much as God. We sorrow that we have offended him in time past, and we fear to do the same in time to come. We esteem him as infinitely perfect in himself, and all-sufficient to make us happy. We love him with all our heart, and soul, and strength. All our desire is to him; he is what we long for. We expect all our felicity in time and in eternity from him, his favour and presence; and we delight ourselves in the Lord from day to day. Now, what a fountain of bliss! what a rich source of happiness are our passions, when thus exercised! How sweet and profitable is it to mourn for sin, and to "sorrow after a godly sort!" How reasonable, and therefore, comfortable, to feel a detestation of sin, the cause of all our misery, the thing which our Beloved hateth! How happy to desire where we are sure of being satisfied, and to love when the object is infinitely worthy of our affection, and makes us such returns of love, as exceed all expression and idea! To hope, when there is no disappointment, and stretch the line of our blissful expectations through all eternity, with a conviction they cannot be frustrated; though the glory expected be such as "hath not entered into the heart of man!" How blessed to "joy in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of our salvation," when the joy is pure, complete, lasting, eternal! "That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Gracious Lord! what comfortable words are these. And is this the

end thou hast in view, in saying, “My son, give me thy heart?”—that thou mayest lodge it in thy bosom and compose it to rest in thy embraces?—that thou mayest relieve its wants, assuage its woes, satisfy its desires, and make it glad with thy salvation? Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief. I believe thou dost will my happiness, and dost invite me to come to thee, that I may “find rest to my soul.” I believe thou dost take pleasure in the prosperity of thy servants, and delight to crown them with loving kindness, and tender mercies; I acknowledge,

“ ’Tis merey all, that thou hast brought
My mind to seek her peace in thee.”

And, through thy grace, I will seek thee; thou shalt be the object of my pursuit, the desire of my eyes, and the joy of my heart. It is true, other lovers have had the ascendancy over my affections, but now I renounce them all; thou art my all-sufficient good; “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul;” “My Beloved is mine, and I am his.” I will serve the Lord. Only fulfil thy promise, and “circumcise my heart,” that I may indeed love thee “with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.” Tear away all my idols, and reign in my heart the lord of every motion. Engross all my affections, and let all my thoughts, and desires, and tempers, be in absolute subjection to thy love, and that continually:

“Each moment draw from earth away
My heart, that lowly waits thy call;
Speak to my inmost soul, and say,
I am thy love, thy God, thy all.
To feel thy power, to hear thy voice,
To taste thy love, be all my choice.”

Again, as our passions, when regulated, conspire with our other faculties, to render us happy; so do all our *tempers*, when changed by the same grace. Believing truly on Christ, we “learn of him” to be “meek and lowly in heart.” We no longer think highly of ourselves, “but soberly as we ought to think.” We do not value ourselves on any endowment, natural or acquired; on our dignity of birth, our riches, our superiority of station, our personal beauty; nor because of our abilities of mind, our education, erudition, or skill in languages, and sciences. We do not think more highly of ourselves for any or all of these; do not prefer ourselves to others who want any of them. But, enlightened by the Word and Spirit of God, we learn to make a due estimate of all that belongs to us, and compare ourselves rather with those that are above us, than with those that are below us; whereby we find perpetual cause for humiliation. Besides, we remember that we owe all that we have and are to God, who has given us our body, with all its members, our soul with all its faculties, and all our talents of whatever kind; and that as he gave us all at first, so he continues all to us, supporting us in every instant of time, by his presence and favour. We see it is, therefore, in the highest degree unreasonable to boast of any thing that we are, or have. And, supposing that we exert to the utmost, those endowments God has given and continues to us, for his glory and the good of mankind, it is no more than our indispensable duty. After all, we are but “unprofitable servants,” and have no cause for glorying. Considering God’s greatness and our littleness, his majesty and our meanness; considering that we have nothing of our own, but de-

pend on his pleasure for every thing, to whom we ought to dedicate all we have, and whom we ought to serve perfectly, constantly, and uninterruptedly; considering this, we fall at his feet, and own ourselves "not worthy of the least of his mercies." "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou shouldest visit him!" How unworthy am I of thy notice! or, if thou dost take notice of me, how deserving of thy wrath! For, "behold I am vile!" because I have sinned against thee. This is another humbling consideration. We have not only failed to serve God with our health and strength, time and talents, as it was our duty to do; but, on the contrary, we have served ourselves, the flesh, the world, the Devil; have done our own will, studied our own interest, sought our own honour. Thus have we sinned against God, our Maker, our Father, our Husband, our rightful Sovereign, and have highly provoked his anger and wrath. Judge, then, if we ought not to come down, and sit in the dust; if we ought not to abhor ourselves; and say, "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." Surely humility will be comes us as creatures, but especially as sinful creatures, who have ten thousand times forfeited all our blessings, and well deserved the extremity of punishment. And if God mercifully spare us, remit our punishment, forgive our sin, and, after all we have done, with astonishing grace, take us into his favour, even this rightly considered, does but humble us the more. We "remember, and are confounded, and never open our mouth any more, because of our shame," though the Lord is "pacified towards us," and has pardoned all our iniquities. Such are our conceptions of things when the Lord Jesus has turned

us from our iniquities. Thus is every high thought brought low, every self-exalting imagination captivated to Christ Jesus. And now, what shall we say of this temper, as it relates to our happiness or misery? What saith the wisdom of the Father. "Blessed," or happy, "are the poor in spirit!" happy indeed, were it only that they are freed from the perpetual perplexity and disquietude attending pride. As they know they do not deserve, so they do not desire, the praise of men. They are strangers, therefore, to the dissatisfaction felt by those who seek for happiness in pursuing this phantom. It is no mortification to them to be overlooked and slighted, yea, to be set at nought, despised, and insulted. This, and more than this, they consider that they deserve. This, their blessed Lord, though infinitely worthy of the adoration of the highest archangels, endured before them. He was derided, buffeted, spit upon, nay, scourged and crucified, like the vilest miscreant. And shall the Master of the house endure all this and those of his household be wholly exempt? Shall innocence suffer this, for the salvation of the guilty, and the guilty think it much, and grieve to suffer one thousandth part of this for themselves? O, no! The true followers of Jesus will rejoice to go with him to prison and to death. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they are humble in their expectations, and not disappointed when they meet with little. They "have learned in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be contented: they know both how to be abased, and how to abound; both to be full and to be hungry; both to abound and to suffer need." Nay, they are always thankful, for they are continually receiving mercies from God, and

favours from man, of which they feel themselves utterly unworthy. They have a thousand times deserved hell, and they praise God that they are not in it. How much more may they praise him for their redemption from it, by Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and the hope of glory; for their adoption into God's family on earth, and the promised enjoyment of himself in heaven. Say, now, if the humble are not happy? Surely they have found rest for their souls; nay, more than rest, they have found enjoyment; for if "in every thing they give thanks," they must "rejoice evermore." They taste the sweet of every thing, and nothing of the bitter; for to them nothing is bitter, but all things (so to speak) are sweet. Such is the necessary connection there is between humility and happiness. I might add here, that as God and man agree to bring down the proud, so they never fail to exalt the humble. The omnipotent God will see that is done. They shall stand higher in his favour, and shall be more advanced in holiness and happiness. "For to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit." Yea, with such will God dwell, refreshing them with the consolations of his presence and spirit. And the more they depress and abase themselves, the more will their fellow-creatures, at least such of them, as are pious, respect and favour them. For as pride aims at the praise of men, and yet misses of it, so humility, which aims singly at the honour of God, obtains together therewith that of man, which is neither sought nor desired. Concerning this, also, we have still further reason for saying, "Happy are the poor in spirit."

After having spent so much time upon humility, I shall say less upon meekness, which is always the consequence of humility, as anger is of pride. By meekness, here I would be understood to mean, a tranquillity and composure of spirit, amidst the various affronts and provocations we meet with from day to day: an even and unruffled mind: not uneasy, or kindling into resentment on any occasion, but mild and gentle, kind and courteous, towards those who would disturb or injure us. This word is sometimes considered in a more extensive sense, as including also resignation, *viz.* acquiescence in the Divine will, and a quiet and patient submission to all the disposals of his Providence. But I now confine myself to the former notion of it. As soon as we are truly humbled and convinced of our utter unworthiness, we shall not be very uneasy under any real or supposed affronts, or ill-usage; we shall not desire and threaten revenge; but “in patience shall possess our souls.” We shall not suffer any passion to boil in our breast, nor entertain a wish hurtful to our fellow-creatures, much less will “the poison of asps be under our lips,” or “our mouth be full of bitterness.” On the contrary, with a “soft answer we shall turn away wrath,” and breathe nothing but compassion and love towards our aggressor. We shall imitate our Master, who “when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” We shall “bless them that curse us, pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us.” We shall remember him, who hath said, “Vengeance is mine, and I will repay.” We shall commit our cause to him whose “eyes are over the righteous,” and whose arm is extended to deliver

and protect them. In short, we shall “be gentle towards all men,” bearing provocation without being inflamed by it, and showing our displeasure when there is occasion for it, without being transported into indecency of language or behaviour; being cool in our spirit when others are not, and keeping possession of our own souls when, perhaps, we can scarcely keep possession of any thing else. We shall be men of peace, who are “not easily provoked,” and quickly pacified, and would rather forgive twenty injuries, than revenge one.* Now, who does not see at first view, that in such a world as this, in which provocations are continually arising, it is impossible to be happy without such a disposition, and hardly possible to be unhappy with it? *Happy are the meek*, for they shall have the greatest, and least disturbed, enjoyment of themselves, their friends, and their God. They shall be free from all the inward disorder, distress, and torture, which fail not to attend an angry temper. That fiend shall not make them a terror to themselves and all around them. But they shall be easy, calm, and quiet, and a “peace which passeth all understanding, shall keep their hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.” “They shall inherit the earth,” says Christ. Whatever there is of sweetness in the creation, they shall taste and relish it. Whatever of good in health, in friends, in honour, in riches, they shall enjoy it: not that they shall be always healthy, honoured, and rich. Our Lord cannot mean so; but they shall, in general, have more of these blessings, than those of a contrary disposition; for meekness has a natural tendency to preserve our health, and all our worldly com-

* See Henry on Matt. v. 5.

forts; and they know how to enjoy these things, and make the most of them. when a kind Providence confers them upon them. But, above all, they are happy, because they shall have a more than ordinary degree of glory and felicity in the "new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Thus we see, while the proud and angry are "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt," the meek and lowly find rest to their souls here, and shall, by and by, enjoy that perfect and eternal "rest which remaineth for the people of God."

But further; nearly related to meekness is benevolence, which is also found in all true believers, in exact proportion to the measure of their faith. For "in Christ Jesus nothing availeth but faith which worketh by *love*;" and "the fruit of the spirit is *love*." It is the second and great commandment in the law, so fully explained and inculcated in the Gospel, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" a command deeply engraven on the hearts of all the lovers of the Lord Jesus, and exemplified in their lives. They consider all mankind as their neighbours; as creatures of the same Creator, deriving their being and blessing from one and the common source; as children of the same family, fed at the same table, depending daily on the same great Parent for a supply of all their wants; as subjects of the same Prince, governed by the same laws, and equally protected by the same Almighty power; but especially they consider them as redeemed by the same precious blood, and placed under equal obligations to "live to him who died for them;" as visited by the same Spirit, and called and urged, in a variety of ways, to partake of

one and the same felicity. Hence, they maintain a tender regard for all men, a warm desire and deep concern for their happiness, which induces them not only to wish no ill of any man, but on the contrary, "as they have opportunity," and ability "to do good unto all men." They are not only just and true in all their dealings, but merciful, according to their power, to the bodies and souls of men. They feed the hungry and clothe the naked; they instruct the ignorant, comfort the distressed, confirm the wavering, strengthen the weak, and succour the tempted. It is their uniform desire and heartfelt delight to diffuse happiness every where, not only among their relations, friends, and fellow-citizens, but to all mankind, however distinguished by language, manners, and customs, and however divided by seas and large tracts of land. It is true, they love some with a peculiar affection, to whom they are bound by ties of blood, friendship, or gratitude. The children of God, especially, they esteem as the excellent of the earth, and delight in them, because they "excel in virtue." For "this commandment have they received from God, that he that loveth God, love his brother also;" as, therefore, they "love him who begat," so they "love also those who are begotten of him." They not only desire to advance their happiness, but they desire their company and conversation; they wish to drink of their spirit, and imitate their example. They take pleasure in joining with them in prayer, and other exercises of religion. As members of one mystical body, "they have the same care one for another," and if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and if one member is honoured, all the mem-

bers rejoice with it." "Beloved," saith St. John, "if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." Now "thereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Such is the love which the disciples of Christ bear to one another. But then they also love, as observed above, though not in the same kind and degree, all mankind. To these they sincerely wish well, and for these they are sincerely concerned. These they will not revile, slander, or backbite; nay, they will say nothing at all of them, tending to their dispraise, unless it be necessary, in order to prevent some evil, or do some good, not otherwise to be avoided or done. And in this case they will take care not to aggravate their faults, or set them in too strong a light, by exceeding the truth, but will rather conceal a part of it; and where the honour of God and the good of mankind oblige them to reveal the whole, they will say what is possible to excuse the offending person, preserving that charity which "thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." To a person possessed of this love to his adversary, the Apostle's injunction will not seem a hard saying: "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst give him drink; be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." And now, who can help perceiving and admiring the beauty of this disposition, and the happiness of those who possess it. How amiable a thing it is to breathe nothing but forgiveness, and love to our bitterest enemies! to bear a tender affection towards all, and uniformly to labour for the good of all, friends and foes, acquaintance and strangers, relations and aliens! to dedicate ourselves wholly to God and our fellow-creatures, serving him.

to the utmost, in benefiting the bodies and souls of men, and thus to resemble the Son of God, "who went about doing good." But observe also its tendency to our happiness. I endeavoured before to give you some faint representation of the misery attending the dispositions of malice and envy. Now, whatever can be said to their discredit, may, with equal propriety, be said in praise of the temper which has been last described. Happy is the lover of mankind, because he is free from the perpetual anxiety and grief which attend the malicious and envious. His "eye is not evil, because God is good;" he does not fret and repine, because others are more successful in their affairs, and more esteemed by men. On the contrary, taught by humility to know himself, and by love to wish as well to all others as himself, he rejoices, in every instance, in another man's happiness, which he may observe; and as instances of happiness, through the Divine goodness, are occurring continually, he finds continual matter of joy. And though he daily meets with instances of misery, over which he mourns, yet his holy mourning does not render him unhappy. There is a sweet peace attending it, which renders it vastly preferable to the frantic and unreasonable mirth of sinners. But, above all, he is happy in that blessed tranquility of soul which ever attends the exercise of *this* love; in the testimony of a good conscience, which is consequent upon it; in the approbation of his God, who pronounces him happy; and in the assurance he has that, as following his Lord on earth, who, when below was most conspicuous for this character, he shall by and by sit down with him on his throne, where love will extend its sway, and

spread its benign influence over all the glorious inhabitants.

Thus have I endeavoured to show you the sufficiency of the religion of Jesus to heal our spiritual maladies, and to rescue us from the miseries occasioned thereby. Little need be said with respect to those which belong more properly to the body. If, as physicians suppose, one class of disorders arise from mental vexation, the favourable influence of religion upon the body, as tending to prevent or heal those disorders, is manifest. Indeed, it is evident, that as tumultuous passions, anxiety of mind, and discontent, are destructive to our bodily health, so a mind, composed, peaceful, and happy, must contribute much thereto. Disorders occasioned by indolence, will likewise be prevented in the man who continually "exercises himself unto godliness." And as for intemperance, this will not injure the followers of Jesus, who cannot but "live soberly," as well as "righteously and godly in this present world." They may, indeed, though now temperate in all things, feel the effects of former intemperance, and groan under the disorders they have brought upon themselves by that means; but to remove these, nothing will be so effectual as a strict regularity for the time to come. But can they suffer nothing from want? No: for as they "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," every thing else "shall be added unto them." They shall be fed "with food convenient for them," and clothed with decent raiment, while they are diligent in business, and dependant on the Divine Providence. You see, therefore, how happy an influence religion has on the body as well as on the mind. Yet it

must be granted that "many are the afflictions of the righteous" Their religion will not preserve them from all diseases; from all the pains, sorrows, and infirmities, to which flesh is heir. But then, a good conscience, resignation to the will of God, love to him, humility, meekness, confidence in the divine protection and care, a persuasion that "all things work together for good to those who love him," together with a hope full of immortality, a prospect of deliverance by death, of a joyful resurrection and rest in paradise, and endless felicity in "the new heaven and the new earth," when "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain;"—these, surely, must afford light in darkness, comfort in trouble, life in death. To a person possessed of these consolations, the words of our sublime poet are applicable,—

"Through nature's wreck, through vanquish'd agonies,
Like the stars struggling through this midnight gloom;
What gleams of joy? What more than human peace?
Where the frail mortal? the poor abject worm?
No, not in death, the mortal to be found,
His comforters he comforts; great in ruin,
With unreluctant grandeur, gives, not yields
His soul sublime; and closes with his fate."

And now, who can help acknowledging with the Psalmist, "Blessed are the people who are in such a case; yea, happy are the people who have the Lord for their God." Who can help addressing each of them, as Moses did Israel of old, "Happy art thou, O *Christian*, who is like unto thee, saved by the Lord."

"Happy while on earth he breathes:
Mightier joys ordain'd to know!"

Joys pure as those of seraphim, large as infinity, lasting as eternity! He is "begotten again unto a lively hope — of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him." At the moment of death, which hastens on apace, he lays down his frail body, and together with it, all his infirmities, diseases, afflictions, and temptations, to repose in the silent grave. There the heart will be no more sick, the head no longer ache; the eyes will not weep, nor the tongue complain. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." There the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor. They have no longer to possess months of vanity, nor are wearisome nights appointed to them. There the happy dead "rest from all their labours," and enjoy an undisturbed repose. At death their spirits pass into paradise, which is a place not of rest only, but unknown enjoyment, where they abide till the morning of the resurrection. There the soul experiences no more temptation to disobey its God, or renounce its Saviour. There it no longer groans under darkness of mind, or hardness of heart. Doubts do not distract, fears oppress, or sorrows overwhelm it. It no longer laments weakness of faith, coldness of love, or languor of desire. It knows God perfectly, and enjoys him constantly. God is to it, all in all, and it is completely happy in him.

But this is not all. The body does not remain under the tyrannic power of death. No; "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O! death, I will be thy plague; O! grave I will be thy destruction." The body shall be raised in perfection and beauty, when it will be ever free from all

disorder and infirmity. "It was sown in weakness, but it shall be raised in power; it was sown in dishonour, but it shall be raised in glory." For, "we look for the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." And, O, how glorious shall that be! what is all earthly glory when compared to it? And what crowns all, it is immortal and incorruptible: for "this mortal must put on immortality, and this corruptible must put on incorruption," and then "death shall be swallowed up in victory." Who can conceive the greatness of the Christian's happiness there, when a perfect body is united to a perfect soul; and an infinitely perfect God and his perfect creatures shall all be given him, to be enjoyed for ever! Then those graces which made him happy on earth, though they were imperfect, shall be matured and perfected, and his felicity together with them. His faith, indeed, being lost in sight, and his hope in full enjoyment, will, of course, cease. And as for meekness, patience, long-suffering, gentleness, and others of the like kind, having a reference to sin, infirmity, misery in ourselves, or our fellow-creatures, these cannot be exercised where no sin, infirmity, or misery gives occasion for them. But love, spiritual and divine, pure and universal, shall live, and grow, and ripen in the future state. Love to God, our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, Sanctifier, humble and thankful, devout and fervent, ecstatic and joyous, shall overflow all hearts, and fill all souls. Love to his creatures, impartial and free, generous and disinterested, shall flourish and spread universally. This, this is their bliss, this their glory. "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God

in him." "Love never faileth." It will for ever yield rapturous delight to the glorified believer; who, while he "ceases not day and night to give glory to him that sitteth on the throne," shall eternally exclaim with adoring gratitude, "My God and my all."

There all is light and splendour; all darkness is past, and the true light will for ever shine. "There shall be no night there," no ignorance, nor error; but all the inhabitants shall know as they are known. The contemplation of the Divine attributes, of God himself, of his works, both of creation, providence, and grace; of that amazing love which pitied, and purposed the restoration of fallen man; of that infinite wisdom which devised the plan of redemption, and of that power which executed it; the contemplation of these things will ever employ, astonish, and enrapture, the saints. There they will recollect with holy ardour and blissful gratitude, the depths of misery into which sin had sunk them, and out of which Divine mercy delivered them, with the various and most suitable methods his grace took in order to that desirable end. Through every period of their earthly pilgrimage, they will trace the loving kindness of the Lord, and, with inexpressible thankfulness, own,

"All, all is right, by God ordain'd or done:
His ways admit no blemish, none they find,
Not one to palliate peevish grief's complaint.

* * * *

For all they praise him, most for the severe;
Hence in one peal of loud eternal praise,
The charm'd spectators thunder their applause,
While the vast void beyond applause resounds."

But why have they received their bodies? Shall not these also administer somewhat to their happiness? Undoubtedly they shall. Why have they eyes, but that they may behold and admire the beauty, riches, and glory, of the golden city, with all the display of infinite wisdom, power, and love, made in the new heavens and the new earth? Why have they ears, but to attend with delight to the melodious strains of celestial music, and hear with joy the praises of hymning seraphim? They shall partake of the fruit that grows in those bowers of bliss, while they breathe the fragrant air, and drink in the sweet perfumes wafted by the odoriferous gales of paradise. They shall converse together about the goodness of their common Lord, and “talk of all his wondrous works.” The genius of archangels, and the tongue of cherubim, shall agree to charm them with heavenly eloquence, and the self-existent Jehovah exert his infinite perfections to render their happiness complete. All hail! ye happy and harmonious bands! your labours and trials are over; your sins and sorrows for ever vanished, and rest and peace, joy and transport, God and glory, are all your own for ever!—For ever! blessed words! how will the very thought of this redouble your joy, and multiply to infinity the transports you feel! Your bliss and glory shall know no period. After millions, yea, ten thousand times ten thousand millions of ages, spent in felicity, your joy is still but begun; millions of ages are still behind! O eternity! great unfathomable idea! how are our thoughts lost in thee, how little do mortals know of thee! Thou God of both worlds, of time and of eternity, send down thy illuminating Spirit to chase the darkness from my mind, that I may know a little

of those things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man," even "the things thou hast prepared for them that love thee." O let a sight of them attract my attention, and engage my affections, that amidst all the trials and afflictions of this mortal life, my "heart may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found!" And then, when thy sovereign wisdom determines, dismiss me hence, that I may perceive, by happy experience, how far I have failed in attempting to describe what the mind of the brightest intelligence above is unable to comprehend!

And now, my brethren, what remains but to mention to whom you are indebted for all this? It is the Lord Jesus, the friend of sinners. He purchased all these blessings by his precious blood, and has an undoubted right to bestow them upon us. He it is who is "sent to bless us, in turning away every one of us from our iniquities." Surely then he should be precious to us, more precious than riches or honours, relations or friends, health, or life itself. And such he will be "to you that believe." "Consider what great things he hath done for you." A darkened understanding, an evil conscience, a perverse will, irregular passions, and diabolical tempers, once distressed you day by day, and made even life a burden to you: you felt a hell here, and feared a more dreadful hell hereafter, which you knew your sins deserved, But from all this he hath mercifully delivered you. Your conscience he hath sprinkled from evil, your will he hath subdued, your passions he hath regulated, and your tempers changed. In the place of a fear of deserved wrath, he hath given you a hope full of immortality. Now you

have "joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." These are great things, but they are not a thousandth part of the blessings he hath in store for you. Hitherto you have only received a mere drop out of that ocean of bliss reserved for you! And will you not love him for all this? *him*, who wept, and languished, and groaned, and died for you? *him*, who endured inconceivable sufferings and shame, that you might have rest, and joy, and glory for ever? Shall he not have your hearts, your lives, your all, who gave his all for you? Can you withhold any thing from him? Surely you cannot, but will say,—

"Nay, but I yield, I yield,
I can hold out no more;
I sink by dying love compell'd,
And own thee conqueror."

But, perhaps, some of you think you have not so much reason to love him, because he has not yet saved you from your iniquities? But why has he not? Who is to blame? He, or you? Surely you will not, you cannot, lay the blame on him who is infinite in mercy and love, and "willeth not the death of a sinner, but that all should turn and live;" who, therefore "gave himself a ransom for all," and whose Spirit strives with all. His blood was shed for you, his Spirit hath visited you. Your own conscience bears witness that he hath, time after time, discovered to you your sinfulness, guilt, and misery, as well as his ability and willingness to save you. He hath warned you of your danger, and excited you to "flee from the wrath to come." All your desires, and convictions, and comforts, come from him, and are a proof of his willingness to save you.

And do you not want this salvation? Can you do without it? can you be happy without obtaining a change of heart and life? happy without an enlightened mind, a resigned will, a pacified conscience, regular affections, and holy tempers? happy without a title to heaven, and an interest in Christ? O no! These must lay a foundation for your happiness. Without these all hopes of it are vain and delusive. And can you produce these things in yourself? Can your wisdom and power, your care and industry, your self-denial and watching, your fasting and prayers, work out this change for you? They cannot. If they could, God would never "have raised up his Son Jesus, and sent him to bless you." But knowing your sinfulness and guilt, he made his Son a sacrifice for your sins; and, knowing your helplessness, he "laid help upon one who is mighty." Observe it well; "There is salvation in no other; for there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby you can be saved." Christ is the only Physician for your sin-sick soul. And O hear his comfortable words, "The Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost." Hence he invites, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else: Besides me there is no Saviour." "Come unto me, ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "If any man," be he who he will, I except none, "thirst, let him," not go to the broken cisterns of his own works, but "come unto me and drink, yea, whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely." And "whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out?" How encouraging are these exhortations? What fountains

of living water are here. Come, my brethren, take your Saviour at his word. Go straight to him with all your diseases: you are needy; he is all-sufficient; apply directly and immediately. Have faith in him. Let your desire be to him, and your expectation from him. Let your trust be in him, and your dependance upon him. Commit your souls to him to be restored by his grace and power. Stand on this rock; build on this foundation; take refuge under this covert. Thus believe on him, and you, even you, shall be saved. He will make you a partaker of present salvation, and you shall not be confounded, world without end.

Once more. I address a few words more particularly to those that are yet young, and under the meridian of life, and I have done. You see, my brethren, if you have attended to and considered what has been advanced, that your fears of being made melancholy and unhappy, if you become truly religious, were quite groundless. I have been demonstrating to you, by undeniable arguments, not only that religion can make you truly and lastingly happy, but also, that you cannot possibly be happy without it. To whatever resources you apply, I testify to you, while your sins are unpardoned, and the wrath of God abides on you; while evil tempers, and irregular and inordinate affections, domineer in your souls; while you are destitute of faith, and love, and hope; of humility, meekness, benevolence; of the mind of Christ, and the image of God; you are, doubtless, miserable at present, and in the way to endless misery! And if you think not, if you are easy and unconcerned, your case is but so much the more deplorable! If, notwithstanding your wretched

condition, you are still at rest, and say, "I shall sit as a queen, and see no sorrow," be assured,—

"by blindness you are bless'd,
By dotage dandled to perpetual smiles;
Your pleasure is the promise of your pain."

For you are saying "peace, when there is no peace;" when you are every moment liable to death and hell, and if you die in this condition you are ruined beyond recovery. O that you were sensible of this! Sensible that you are feeding upon husks, while in your "Father's house there is bread enough and to spare!" sensible that the things you pursue cannot satisfy your immortal souls! But if they could, what would that signify to you, who must so soon leave them! whose life is a vapour, a dream, a shadow! who art passing through this world as an arrow through the air! It is certain you must die soon, but when is uncertain: you may die this day;—this hour! And do you not fear death? Not fear it! While your sins are unpardoned, your soul is all polluted! Who have deserved hell, and are just fit for it, do not you fear death? I hope you do. I trust your conscience is not yet seared as with a hot iron! It is a good symptom; a sign you are not given up to a reprobate mind, but that the Physician has begun with you. O be not afraid to have your wound probed! rather be afraid of having it slightly healed, while it festers and corrupts within. You are sorely wounded, and cannot expect to be healed without being put to pain. But you may depend upon it, your Physician will put you to as little as possible. Let him take what method with you he thinks fit. Trust yourself to him, and follow his di-

rections, and all will be well. He will certainly work a cure, and restore you to perfect health. And then, what ease, and peace, and rest, and joy, will succeed! how satisfying, how firm, how durable will be your happiness! “Not as the world giveth, will Christ give unto you;” not what is empty and vain, but solid and substantial; not fading and transitory, but lasting and abiding! You will possess unspeakable peace in the approbation of God, and your conscience; unspeakable satisfaction in divine love and benevolence to man; unspeakable joy and transport in the prospect of a crown and a kingdom which fadeth not away. You will look down with contempt on the wealth of the Indies, the glory of conquerors, as well as on all the pleasures of the voluptuary, having found “a better and more enduring substance.” You will be blessed while you live; blessed in your death; blessed through all eternity. And now, my brethren, what think you of this? Is not this worth your attention? If so, why will you neglect it? why will you suffer the world to engross your affections, and hinder your attainment of this most valuable good? Why do you delay to possess riches which are permanent? honours that are inexhaustible? fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore? Do not any longer hesitate. Can you be happy too soon? O no! This is the very thing you want; you want to be happy, and soon too; and because you think religion is an enemy to present, however it may promote future, happiness, therefore you do not care to have any thing to do with it. But this is a mistake throughout. Religion is no enemy to your happiness, but the one way of obtaining it. Sin is your enemy; this has brought all your miseries upon you. But re-

ligion has done you no evil, but would do you much good if you would seek it. Keep not back through unbelief. "These are the true sayings of God." Be persuaded, at least, to suppose they may be true. Try them. "Prove all things." You have tried other things, and have not found happiness in them, now try religion. But be in earnest; you will not find happiness even in it, if it does not engross your heart, if it is not your principal concern. Do not mistake; do not think a dull round of outward duties and services are religion. It is nothing less than the Spirit of God dwelling in the heart, regulating and changing its various faculties, as above described. Let this be your religion. And remember it is lodged in Christ for you. He loves you, and is ever ready to bestow it upon you. Apply to him for it without delay. This day, this hour, this moment, lift up your heart to him in fervent prayer, "Lord, shew me thy salvation, save me from my sins, take possession of my heart, and reign in me without a rival." Pray in faith, nothing doubting; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, "with your heart unto righteousness;" look to him, and depend upon him. Thus go to him, and "take his yoke upon you, and learn of him, and you shall find rest to your souls; for his yoke is easy, and his burden is light."

CXX.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST ATTESTED
BY THE APOSTLES.

ACTS IV. 33.

*With great power gave the Apostles witness of the
resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*

THE resurrection of the Lord Jesus is at once the most important fact, and the most instructive, and consolatory doctrine of Christianity. Indeed it is the main pillar, and chief corner stone, supporting and connecting its whole fabric. While this stands, the whole of Christianity will be maintained: if this could be overturned, the whole must come down with it. Well did the Apostles know this; and therefore, when Judas, one of the twelve, who ought, with them, to have borne testimony to this fact, had fallen from his office, through transgression, and it became necessary to choose one in his place, the attestation of this fundamental point is particularly mentioned as the chief reason of the choice. (Acts i. 21, 22.) And they justly particularized this point; for after the Lord Jesus, just before his ascension, had shown them how the Scriptures of the Old Testament had foretold his sufferings and resurrection, he added, "And ye are witnesses of these things." (Luke xxiv. 46—48.) Thus St. Peter (1 Epis. v 1) terms himself "a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed," and actually bore testimony to it

in all his sermons, as recorded in the Acts, (ch. ii. 22—32; iii. 13—26; iv. 10; v. 30—32; x. 40, 41;) as likewise did St. Paul continually. (Acts xiii. 30, 37; xvii. 3, 31.)—Now, as the reason of the extraordinary stress laid on this single fact is, probably, not sufficiently understood by many among us, nor the close connection which it has with every doctrine, duty, and privilege of Christianity seen, it may therefore be desirable, at this time, to inquire into this subject, and state,

I. ON WHAT GROUND THE APOSTLES BORE WITNESS
TO THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

It was not on the ground of uncertain conjecture, or mere probable reasoning; but on that of the most perfect knowledge, and full assurance of understanding, and of faith. Observe we how they attained that knowledge and understanding.

The Lord Jesus had given them proof, in a variety of ways, that he was the true and long expected Messiah. He had completely fulfilled, and answered in his person and ministry, in his life and death, the predictions uttered, and characters drawn of the Messiah in the Old Testament, *e. g.*, they had full evidence, that he was of the seed of Abraham and of David; that he was born in Bethlehem, born of a virgin; that “he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows,” betrayed by his “familiar friend;” that he was scourged, that his hands and feet were pierced, that vinegar and gall were given him to drink, that his garments were parted, and lots cast upon his vesture, that “his grave was appointed with the

wicked, and he was with the rich in his death;”* which particulars had been predicted concerning him.—They had heard the testimony of John the Baptist, and, probably also the voice from heaven at his baptism, as also the testimony of his mother, and of Joseph, of Zacharias and Elizabeth, and of the shepherds concerning the extraordinary circumstances of his birth.—They had for three years heard him speak “as never man spake,” and that in private and public, day by day; had noticed the salutary and sanctifying tendency of his doctrine, and its consistency with the Scriptures of the Old Testament.—They had seen him live, as never man lived; had observed his innocence; and his usefulness, “who went about doing good”—They had been spectators of his mighty works, and had witnessed Isaiah’s prophecy fulfilled, “Behold, your God will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;—then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing”—(Isai. xxxv. 4—5.)—Three of them had witnessed his transfiguration. (Matt. xvii. 1—9; 2 Pet. i. 17, 18)—By these, and other proofs, they were fully satisfied of his being the Messiah, and confessed their faith in him accordingly. (Matt. xvi. 16.) — —

Now, as it was clearly foretold in the Old Testament that the Messiah should suffer, and rise from the dead,

* Such, nearly, is the translation Bishop Lowth gives of Isaiah liii. 9; on which passage Mr. Scott justly observes, “As our Lord was crucified between two thieves, it was doubtless intended he should be buried with them; but Joseph of Arimathea came and asked for his body, and Pilate, convinced he had committed no crime, readily granted Joseph’s request. Thus he was *with the rich in his death*, that is, till his resurrection.—The designed obscurity of the prophecy renders its accomplishment the more remarkable.”—E.

his disciples might and ought to have concluded that, as he had suffered in the very way the Scriptures had predicted, he also *had risen*; (Luke xxiv. 25—27;) more especially, as Jesus himself, the exact accomplishment of whose predictions they had witnessed in many cases, had expressly foretold that he should rise again. See Matt. xvi. 21; xvii. 22, 23; xxvi. 31, 32

Nevertheless, so far from being credulous, they did not believe the fact, although this strong evidence had been previously afforded to them. Nay, they did not so much as expect his resurrection, but prepared spices to embalm his body, and actually set out with that design, inquiring “among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?” (Mark xvi. 1—3; Luke xxiii. 56; xxiv. 1.)

The first thing that inclined them to think he was risen was, their finding the stone rolled away, the body removed, and the napkin, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped up in order by itself. (John xx. 1—10.) For “the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door—” (Matt. xxviii. 2.)—Peter and John having returned from the sepulchre, Mary stayed, weeping, and saw first, two angels in white, and then Jesus. (John xx. 11—18.) Some other women also saw a vision of angels. (Luke xxiv. 4—10.)—He further appeared to the two disciples going to Emmaus. (Luke xxiv. 15.)—The same day he appeared to Peter. (Ver. 34.)—And in the evening to the eleven; (Luke xxiv. 36; John xx. 19;) when he showed them his hands and his feet, suffered them to handle him, and even ate with them.—After eight days he appeared again to his disciples, and

proved his resurrection to the satisfaction of Thomas. (John xx. 26.)—But the grand proof was given to five hundred brethren at once in Galilee. (Mark xvi. 7; Matt xxviii. 10; 1 Cor. xv. 6.)—He afterwards discovered himself to seven of the disciples at the sea of Tiberias. (John xxi. 1—8.)—I do not mention his appearing to St. Paul, in consequence of which he was brought to be an Apostle, because this did not happen till after the period to which my text refers. — —

When the Apostles were thus fully convinced of the resurrection of Jesus, they endeavoured to convince others of the same extraordinary and unprecedented fact.—But consider,

II. IN WHAT WAY AND MANNER THEY DID THIS.

As their first address was to the Jews, who had fully and long expected a triumphant, and externally glorious, Messiah, and were deeply prejudiced against a Messiah, who appeared in poverty, meanness; and a state of suffering, their first endeavour was to remove these prejudices, by showing, from many passages of the Old Testament, that the Messiah was to suffer. (Acts xvii. 3.)—Thus the way was open for their proving, by various considerations, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised; considerations chiefly by which they themselves had been influenced.—They showed from the Old Testament that the Messiah was to rise from the dead, (Acts xvii. 3,) especially referring to Psal. xvi. 9—11; and to die no more.—They testified that Jesus was risen, that he had conversed and eaten with them, and had been handled of them, and all this repeatedly.—They gave evident proof, that,

in bearing this testimony, they had no sinister end in view, and should, and could gain nothing by it.—They gave full proof that they expected, and should meet with reproach, the loss of all things, yea, and death itself, which many of them did endure, and that under various methods of torture.—God enabled them to work many and great miracles, in confirmation of their testimony.—He enabled them to foretell many future events, some of which soon came to pass.—He gave great success to their word, enabling them to convert myriads to the faith, and that even among the heathen, reclaiming them from the grossest idolatry, and the greatest vices.—And this they accomplished, although the philosophers, priests, and government, opposed them.—Well then might this historian affirm, that they gave witness (*μεγαλη δυναμις*) “with great power,” or *efficacy*.—But,

III. FOR WHAT END AND REASON.

They bore testimony to it, not only because of its being a most extraordinary and marvellous fact; but because of its infinite importance to the glory of God, and the happiness of mankind. They considered it as fulfilling the Scriptures, and thereby sealing and confirming the prophecies of the Old Testament, and thus laying a firm foundation for faith in them, even for the Gentiles.—As demonstrating Jesus to be the Messiah the Son of God, the Saviour, the Prince of life, and Conqueror of death, and thereby determining the most important question that could possibly be asked, next to, *Who is the true God?* and thus laying a firm foundation for faith in him as such. (Rom. i. 4.)—As demon-

strating the certain truth and infinite importance of every part of his doctrine, that it might be, not only firmly believed, but properly regarded.—As showing that he had fully expiated sin before God, and obtained pardon and justification for all the penitent that believe in him.—As essentially necessary to his sustaining and exercising each of his sundry offices and characters, as that of a Teacher, (Acts iii. 22, 23; Eph. iv. 21,) a Mediator and Priest, (Heb. iv. 14; vii. 26; viii. 1—6; ix. 15—24,) an Advocate, (1 John ii. 1,) a Governor, (Ephes. i. 20—22; 1 Cor. xv. 25;)—as our Shepherd, (Heb. xiii. 20,) our way, truth, life. (John xiv. 6.)—As opening an intercourse between earth and heaven, and making way for our receiving the Holy Ghost. (John xvi. 7; Luke xxiv. 49.)—As “giving assurance to all men” of a general resurrection of the just and unjust, and of a future judgment, (Acts xvii. 31; 1 Cor. xv. 12.)—As demonstrating that there is a future most blessed life for both soul and body; (1 Cor. xv. 20;) and begetting us again to a hope of it. (1 Pet. i. 3.)—As showing that we ought to raise our thoughts to, and set our affections upon, this life, (Col. iii. 1,) and to die to all below.—That we ought not only to secure a title to it by our justification and adoption, but also a meetness for it in our sanctification, and a conformity to Christ’s death and resurrection.—That we ought patiently, and even joyfully, to take up our cross, and die, and suffer with Jesus that we may rise and reign with him. (2 Tim. ii. 11, 12; Rom. viii. 17, 18.) — *

* The Author, when he made this the subject of a discourse, was accustomed to speak, under a fourth head, of *THE EFFECT* of the Apostles’ testimony, and the abundant blessing wherewith God was pleased to crown their labours. But we regret that his manuscript is here defective.—E.

CXXI.

ON RECEIVING THE HOLY GHOST.

ACTS XIX. 2.

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?

AN important question this indeed, as every one must perceive, who considers how much is said in the inspired writings respecting the absolute necessity of receiving the Holy Ghost, in order to salvation, and the blessed effects produced thereby. And yet, important as the inquiry is, it is one, which, there is reason to fear many professing Christians must answer, as the Ephesian disciples did, to whom it was first put, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Or, at least, as their whole spirit and conduct evince, they must answer it in the negative, and acknowledge they have not received him.

But, inquire we,

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN RECEIVING THE HOLY GHOST, AND WHETHER WE MAY AND MUST RECEIVE HIM?

By the "Holy Ghost" here, you all know is meant the "Holy Spirit," generally termed the "Spirit of God," that is, of *the Father*, as proceeding from him, although sometimes also styled the "Spirit of Christ," or, "of *the Son*;" Christ and his Father being *one*, and the Spirit of the Father being also the Spirit of the Son,

in a way to us unsearchable. It would have been well, I have thought, if the word *Spirit*, in our language, had been always used on this subject, rather than the word *Ghost*; because, however suitable that term may be when applied to a departed soul in its state of separation from the body, it seems hardly proper when spoken of the Spirit of God; for, surely, the *Ghost of God*, is an expression very harsh. Add to this, that as the word *ghost* generally means a created spirit, an individual, distinct, and separate being, I fear this term, when applied to the Holy Spirit, has led some into an idea, that that Spirit is an individual, intelligent Being, if not created, yet distinct and separate from the Father, which, certainly, is a great mistake. For that would, to all intents, make *two* Gods; and if we were to conceive of the Son, who is the Word of the Father in a similar way, we should make *three* Gods. But “the Lord our God is one Lord,” (Deut. vi. 4,) though in his essence there exist three co-equal persons. Man, and the spirit of a man that is in him, we must remember, do not imply *two* individual human beings, but *one* only; just so, God, and the Spirit of God, are not *two* Gods, but *one* only, one undivided, infinite Jehovah. Nevertheless, the Father, his Word, and Spirit, may be distinguished from each other, in some sense, and spoken of as distinct, as they frequently are in Scripture; for we read, “there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost;” (1 John v. 7;) but this distinction is not such as amounts to any separation of one from the other, for “these three are one.”

This being observed, it will easily appear, that to receive the Spirit of God, is really, to receive God

himself, although not fully and absolutely; for a creature cannot contain the Creator, nor can finite comprehend infinite. Or, rather, it is to receive his divine inspiration or influence, opening an intercourse between him and us, imparting those graces, or gifts, which are necessary, or conducive, to our salvation. And, indeed, generally, if not always, where the Spirit of God is said to be given to us, what is meant, is a supernatural and divine influence, communicated to us from God, or the effect of such an influence.

Now, the manner in which this is done, is, to us, in many respects, incomprehensible and inexplicable, as is intimated by our Lord, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John iii. 8.) Or, perhaps, in these words our Lord rather means to illustrate the nature of this influence by that of the wind or air upon our bodies, of the influence of which we are perfectly sensible; which we breathe, and by which we live. This also might be his intention when he "breathed on his disciples," and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Indeed the air, or wind, is a suitable and fine emblem of the Holy Spirit; and accordingly the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, use one word for both. In other passages, water, as cleansing the filthy, (Ezek. xxxvi. 25,) and refreshing the thirsty, (John vii. 37, 38,) is made an emblem of this sacred influence, and, frequently, light, or fire, whereby objects are made visible, and metals purified, are employed for the same purpose. (Eph. v. 13; Matt. iii. 11.)

We must, therefore, receive the Holy Spirit, as our bodies, or our lungs, receive the air, and we breathe

and live; as our stomachs receive water, and we are refreshed, or wine, and we are cheered; or as a lamp, candle, or fuel, receives the fire that lights it, and causes it to shine and burn; or, as the iron in the furnace receives the heat whereby it glows and melts, and is refined and purified.

But are we authorized to expect any such thing? Certainly we are; and, in proof of this assertion, we need only read a few passages of Holy Scripture.—“It shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,—and also upon the servants, and upon the handmaids, in those days will I pour out my Spirit.” (Joel ii. 28, 29.) “As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.” (Isai. lix. 21.) “I, indeed,” said John the Baptist, “baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I,—he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” (Matt. iii. 11.) “In the last day of the feast Jesus cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me,—out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John vii. 57, 58.) “I will pray the Father,” said Jesus, “and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him; but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” (John xiv. 16, 17.) “If ye, being evil, know how to give

good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." (Luke xi. 13.) "Peter said,—Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts ii. 38, 39.)

The sentiments of the Church of England, on this subject, may be seen in her Liturgy, and, in particular, in her Collects for Whitsunday, for the nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, and in that for the Communion Service. And all the true Churches of Christ hold the same doctrine. — —

But, if we are authorized to expect, and must receive, the Holy Ghost, it becomes us to inquire,

II. IN WHAT SENSE WE ARE TO RECEIVE HIM, AND FOR WHAT PURPOSES.

The context shows that the Apostle spoke partly in reference to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit; for when having laid hands upon them, "the Holy Ghost came on them, they spake with tongues and prophesied." (Ver. 6.) These were given of old to, and by, Moses, to confirm the Law; and to, and by, Christ, and his Apostles, to sanction and establish the Gospel. They do not seem to be necessary when, or where, the Christian religion is already received, and has gained a prevailing interest, and they are not, and never were, infallible signs of grace. (Matt. vii. 22; 1 Cor. xiii. 1.) Therefore, they are not to be coveted as much as sav-

ing grace, nor, perhaps, to be expected by us, at this day. Whether they will be restored to the Church before the consummation of all things, to give success to the Gospel in heathen nations, time alone can show.

— —

But we may, and must, receive the Spirit in his ordinary graces; to renew our fallen nature; (Tit. iii. 5;) to enable us to bring forth holy dispositions, words, and actions, or, the “fruits of righteousness,” which are every where represented in Scripture as proceeding from him. (Eph. v. 9; Gal. v. 22, 23.)

To be more particular. We must receive him,

AS A SPIRIT OF TRUTH; to enlighten our minds, and save us from ignorance, error, folly, and delusion. (John xiv. 17.) How incorrect, and, even in circumstances most favourable for acquiring spiritual knowledge, how superficial the views which we naturally form concerning ourselves, God, Christ, the way of salvation, our duty and happiness! and how prone to be deluded with vain hopes of finding happiness in the world!—To convince of sin by the law, enlightening us in the spirituality, extent, and obligation of it; and of righteousness by the Gospel. (John xvi. 8—11.) — —

AS A SPIRIT OF LIFE; (Rom viii. 2; 1 Cor. xv. 45; John xiv. 19; Eph. ii. 1, 5, 6;) awakening us from our natural insensibility about spiritual things; alarming us by a view of our danger from divine condemnation; exciting softness of heart, godly sorrow, contrition, humiliation, for sin; drawing us to Christ in desires and supplications; imparting faith, by which we have an interest in Christ, and a real, spiritual life in a union with him; a life advanced in proportion to the increase of our light and knowledge of God, and particularly of

our faith, as it is said, "The just shall live by faith." (Heb. x. 38.) —

AS A SPIRIT OF GRACE; converting and regenerating us. (John iii. 5, 6; Tit. iii. 5, 6.) The necessity of this is founded on our fall. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. viii. 8.) Hence, a real and great change must take place, not only in the understanding, but also in the will, conscience, and affections. —

AS A SPIRIT OF ADOPTION; (Gal. iv. 4; Rom. viii. 15, 16;) assuring us of our sonship, and inspiring the tempers of dutiful children towards a loving father; particularly confidence, hope, peace, and love. —

AS A SPIRIT OF POWER; encouraging and strengthening us; (Eph. iii. 16;) which is necessary—for our spiritual warfare, (Eph. vi. 10,) considering the number, power, subtlety, malice, and diligence of our enemies, and our inability of ourselves to withstand them.—For duty. It is required of us, to "love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves," to love our enemies, to "mortify the deeds of the body," to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," to "deny ourselves," to take up the daily cross, and follow Christ; duties which of ourselves we cannot perform. (Phil. ii. 13.)—For suffering. We must suffer. (Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12,) it may be, in many ways, — — and we shall faint, unless we are strengthened with help from on high. (2 Tim. ii. 1; 2 Cor. xii. 9; Phil. i. 19.) —

AS A COMFORTER, (John xiv. 16,) or advocate; suggesting such thoughts, hopes, assurances, as are adapted to invigorate and encourage us, and giving us joy and

peace, (Rom. xv. 13,) communion with God, (1 John i. 3,) and an earnest of heaven in our hearts. — —

As a SPIRIT OF HOLINESS, or sanctification; (1 Pet. i. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13;) carrying on and completing the change begun in our regeneration, cleansing us from sin, (Ezek. xxxvi. 25,) renewing us after the whole image of God, and imparting his nature, (Tit. iii. 5; 2 Cor. vii. 1; 2 Pet. i. 4, Eph. iii. 17—19,) so that we live not, but “Christ liveth in us;” “to us to live is Christ:” we “live not to ourselves, but to him that died for us and rose again;” we are entirely given up to, and employed in his service, and “sealed unto the day of redemption.” — —

Hence it will easily appear,

III. IN WHAT SENSE, AND HOW FAR, A MAN MAY BELIEVE, AND NOT YET HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST, AND HOW LITTLE SUCH A FAITH WILL AVAIL HIM.

Without having received the Spirit in the forementioned respects, we may believe,—The being and attributes of God. (Heb. xi. 6,) inferring them by reasoning from the works of creation; (Rom. i. 20;)—The truth of the Scripture, admitting it from the consideration of the internal and external evidences whereby they are supported,—as the excellency of their doctrines and precepts. the reality of the miracles wrought, and prophecies fulfilled.—We may believe the great doctrines contained in the Scripture, finding them out, and being convinced of them by diligent search.—That Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, that he is the person the Scriptures describe him to be, and he has done and suffered all that is recorded of him, and is able and even willing

to save us;—The promises and threatenings, and that God will fulfil them. But, without the Holy Spirit, our faith cannot be a saving faith, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (Rom. viii. 9.) The benefits above mentioned, as flowing from the Holy Spirit, are all necessary to salvation. — I shall,

IV. APPLY THE QUESTION, AND GIVE DIRECTIONS, BOTH TO THOSE THAT HAVE, AND TO THOSE THAT HAVE NOT, RECEIVED HIM.

“Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”—received him as a Spirit of truth,—of life,—of grace,—of adoption,—of power,—of comfort,—of holiness? — —

To those that have not received the Spirit, I would say,—Reflect seriously and continually on the necessity and excellency of this gift,—Pray much for it, (Luke xi. 5—13,) with earnestness, importunity, and perseverance.—Shun whatever is contrary to the mind of the Spirit, or would prevent your receiving him.—He works by “the word of truth;” therefore, hear, read, meditate upon, and exercise faith therein.—Through his aid deny yourself, and “mortify the deeds of the body.” (Rom. viii. 13)—Come to Jesus, and exercise faith in him for this blessing. (John vii. 37, 38; iv. 10; Gal. iii. 13, 14.)

Let me exhort those who have received this Spirit,—to guard, not only against doing despite to him, or quenching his influences, but against grieving this Spirit, lest he withdraw from you;—To use carefully all those means of grace, whereby his grace may be continued and increased;—To “live and walk in the Spirit;” —To seek to be “filled with the Spirit.” — —

CXXII.

THE FAITHFUL MINISTER'S APPEAL.

ACTS xx. 26, 27.

I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

THAT a Minister of Christ should be "pure from the blood of all men," in the sense here meant by the Apostle, and not be chargeable with the murder, so to speak, of immortal souls; with the death, the everlasting death of those of his hearers who finally perish, must indeed be of vast consequence to himself, as it is here represented.

It is difficult to say how he can save his own soul, if, through unfaithfulness to his trust, or the neglect of his duty in the high and important office which he sustains, and has voluntarily undertaken, he destroy, or forbear to save the souls of others; "O son of man," said the Lord to Ezekiel, "I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul." (Ezek. xxxiii. 7—9.) If we execute our trust faithfully, therefore, we "deli-

ver our souls;" if we do not, the blood, that is, the death, the everlasting death of those that perish will be required at our hands; and the loss, the punishment that is incurred, who can describe, or even conceive? In this respect, the Ministers of the Gospel, the heavenly watchmen appointed to keep guard over men's souls, and "watch for them, as those that must give account," seem to be placed in a situation of peril, resembling that of the fourscore officers, stationed by Jehu at the door of the house of Baal. "If any of the men," said he, "whom I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him." (2 Kings x. 24.) If any of the people delivered by God into our hands, and committed to our charge, not for their destruction, but for their salvation, escape from under our care, wander back into the world, and perish through our neglect, must not the life of him that letteth him go, be for his life? Nor does this concern those Ministers only, whose false doctrine or corrupt lives, evidently mislead the people, and cause them to go astray from the ways of godliness, but it respects those also, who, through inattention, lukewarmness, sloth, negligence, self-indulgence, or any other such corrupt and unjustifiable motive, omit to exert themselves as they might, and should, for the salvation of souls. "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel,—Thus saith the Lord God,—Wo be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?—The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but

with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and became meat to all the beasts of the field.—Therefore,—thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.” (Ezek. xxxiv. 2—10.)

But how may we escape this punishment? how may we be pure from the blood of those to whom we minister? on what ground was the Apostle so confident that he was pure from the blood of all men? On this, that he could appeal to all who had heard him,—that he had “not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God;” that he had “kept back nothing that was profitable unto them,” but had “showed them, and taught them, publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ver. 20, 21.)—That “by the space of three years, he had not ceased to warn every one,” who was willing to hear him, “day and night with tears,” (ver. 31,) addressing them, first, in the Jewish Synagogue, and then in the school of Tyrannus.—That he had enforced his doctrine by his life, to which he could appeal as having been unblameable and holy. “Ye know,” says he to the Elders, or overseers of the flock, “from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befel me by the lying in wait of the Jews.” (Ver. 18, 19.)—And then, that he

had been perfectly disinterested in his labours among them, seeking “not theirs but them,” and serving them, not for his own emolument, or even for a maintenance, but out of pure love to the Lord Jesus, and their immortal souls, and with a single eye to the glory of God, and their salvation. “I have coveted,” says he, “no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Ver. 33—35.)—Add to this, that he was not indifferent about the important subjects of his testimony, and the object of his labours, but his whole heart and soul were engaged therein; and he held his life cheap in comparison of these things. Although forewarned by the infallible Spirit of truth, that “in every city, bonds and afflictions abided him;” yet, he went on with his work, “none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.” (Ver. 24.) And this Gospel he testified in so earnest, lively, and affectionate a manner, that he not only addressed all in general, at stated times, but, as he assures us, “warned every one,” in particular, “night and day with tears.”

Well then might he say that he was “pure from the blood of all men!” Had he preached only a *part* of the “counsel of God,” and, through fear of censure, desire of praise, or for any other motive, “kept back some things,” that were important to their salvation.

and, therefore, needful to be spoken;—or, had his life contradicted his profession, and given the lie to his doctrine;—or, had he had some selfish or sinister end in view, as his own ease, or honour, or temporal interest;—or, had he not felt the importance of his message, and been willing to give up all, to endure any hardship and risk, nay, and lay down his life in this service;—then would he have been far from thinking himself “pure from the blood” of those that attended his ministry.

What a lesson does the Apostle, hence, read to us in this passage! Of what vast importance is every part of the “counsel of God,” of the “truth as it is in Jesus!” And how inconsistent with the character of a Gospel-minister, I will not say, is an immoral or an ungodly life, but even that liberality of sentiment, or, to speak more properly, that latitudinarianism of principle, which acts as if all doctrines were equally unimportant, and truth and error the same thing; or, that lukewarmness of heart, and indolence of life, which will neither do nor suffer any thing for the sake of any truth of God.—

But,

I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND HERE BY THE COUNSEL OF GOD, AND WHEN MAY IT BE SAID THAT A MINISTER OF CHRIST DECLARES ALL THAT COUNSEL.

Perhaps, by “the counsel of God,” here spoken of, some may think we are to understand the counsel which is supposed to have been agreed, speaking after the manner of men, between the Father and the Son, for our redemption and salvation, before the foundation

of the world, and which has been thought to be intended Zech. vi. 12, 13, and termed, the "counsel of peace." But many learned and pious men greatly doubt the existence of any such counsel, and, at least, are of opinion, that if it existed, it is not revealed to us, and therefore cannot properly be made the subject of our consideration or inquiry. In the passage of the Prophet Zechariah, it is probable that quite another thing is meant.* — Nor is there any reference here to that counsel, or plan, or mystery of Divine Providence, according to which those great events will take place in due season, which have been foretold respecting the world and the Church, and which will accomplish the prophecies, and fulfil God's designs towards the human race; for this is but very partially and obscurely revealed, and is never represented in Scripture as necessary to be known by us, in order to our salvation.—Much less is the Apostle to be understood here of that counsel of God, secret to us, whereby some imagine, he hath fore-ordained whatever comes to pass, and in particular elected a certain number of individuals from among mankind unto eternal life, who shall infallibly be saved, while others have been pretermitted. With respect to which, it is sufficient to say that, if it be true, yet, as being secret from men, it cannot be a branch of that counsel of God, on the declaration of which the Apostle laid so much stress.—

But, by "the counsel of God" here, we are to understand, that counsel which, as we read in Luke vii. 30, "the Pharisees and lawyers rejected," and which the true disciples of John the Baptist, and of Jesus Christ, accepted; generally termed "the Gospel,"

* See Vol. II. p. 155.

“the Gospel of Christ,” “the Gospel of our salvation,” and “the Word of the truth of the Gospel.” Of this our Lord spoke, when he said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;” (Mark xvi. 15;) and St. Paul, when he said, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ;” (Rom. i. 16;) “Our Gospel came not unto you in word only;” (1 Thess. i. 5;) “Moreover, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received,” &c ; (1 Cor. xv. 1, 2;) “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation.” (Eph. i. 13.) Now this includes several particulars, which must all be delivered if we would “declare all the counsel of God;” as,

MATTERS OF DOCTRINE, which must be known, believed, and laid to heart.—These are the foundation and source of all the rest, of all religion and morality, and are, therefore, first necessary to be declared.—By these, especially, Christ and his Apostles are “the lights of the world;” by these also we, who “were once darkness,” are made “light in the Lord,” (Eph. v. 8,) are translated “out of darkness into marvellous light.” (1 Pet. ii. 9.) In them “the Day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death;” (Luke i. 78, 79;) and we are made “the children of light, and the children of the day;” (1 Thess. v. 5;) by these we are “quickened, when dead in trespasses and sins,” (Eph. ii. 1—5; John v. 25,) for, said our Lord, “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life;” (John vi. 63; see also Heb. iv. 12;) by these we are “made free;” (John viii. 32;) by these we are regenerated; “of his own will begat he us with the Word

of Truth;" (James i. 18;) are sanctified; "sanctify them through thy truth;" (John xvii. 17;) nay, and are finally saved; "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth;" (2 Thess. ii. 13;) "I declare unto you the Gospel,—by which also ye are saved." (1 Cor. xv. 1, 2.) These effects will not be produced by Satan's lies, by error, by *any kind* of doctrine, but only by "the truth as it is in Jesus;" to "bear witness" to which, Jesus "was born, and came into the world," (John xviii. 37)—These matters of doctrine comprehend the truths which concern the existence and perfections of God, his creation, preservation, and government of all things, especially of mankind; what man was at his first creation; what he has become through the entrance of sin; God's great compassion and love, manifested in his redemption; the person and offices of the Redeemer; the process whereby he accomplished his great work of humiliation and exaltation, grace and glory; the nature of the Covenants, and their relations to man; the nature and essence of the Holy Spirit, and his saving operations in all that love God; the future judgment, the resurrection of the body, the blessedness of the righteous in heaven; and other great doctrines which it is of the highest importance to know, believe, and lay to heart; (John viii. 31, 32;) which are termed "the mystery of the faith," to be "held in a pure conscience;" (1 Tim. iii. 9;) "the faith once delivered to the saints," for which we must "earnestly contend," (Jude 3,) and "strive together." (Phil. i. 27)—This "whole counsel of God," every Christian Minister must fully "declare," and keep back none of these things.—

MATTERS OF GRACE AND PRIVILEGE, which must be experienced and enjoyed.—There are divers things in Christianity which it is not sufficient to know in theory, or to have just and clear views of them; but we must know them in experience; as that we are fallen, *i. e.*, ignorant, sinful, guilty, depraved, weak, and wretched creatures by nature, but are redeemed and saved by grace; we must experience repentance; faith and its fruits; illumination, justification, peace with God, (Rom. v. 1,) adoption into his family, (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18; John i. 12,) the Spirit of adoption, (Gal. iv. 4,) regeneration, a new creation after the image of God, (Eph. iv. 23, 24,) a lively hope of eternal life (1 Pet. i. 3,) direction and help in all difficulties and trials, (Rom. viii. 14; Prov. iii. 6; Isai. xli. 10,) love, joy, peace, and all the graces of God's Spirit, (Gal. v. 22, 23,) communion with the Father and the Son, by the Holy Spirit, (2 Cor. vi. 16; John xiv. 23; 1 John i. 3; Rev. iii. 20,) and hereby an earnest of heaven; that the Christian life is a warfare and a scene of suffering, that "the grace of God is sufficient for us," (2 Cor. xii. 9,) and that through his strengthening us, we are enabled to "stand in the evil day," (2 Tim. ii. 1; Eph. vi. 13,) and to overcome to the last, believing that these "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work out for us, a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.)—It is necessary that we should experience and enjoy these things. — —

MATTERS OF DUTY AND PRACTICE, to be performed and done. This branch of "the counsel of God," includes the whole of piety and virtue, our duty to God,

our neighbour, and ourselves; or the "living godly, righteously, and soberly, in the present world." (Tit. ii. 12—14.) the being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation," (Phil. ii. 15,) the having our "conversation as it becometh the Gospel of Christ," (Phil. i. 27,) the "walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called," (Eph. iv. 1,) the "working no ill to our neighbour," (Rom. xiii. 10,) but "as we have opportunity, doing good to all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith;" (Gal. vi. 10;) the being "ready to every good work," (Tit. iii. 1,) "careful to maintain good works;" (ver. 8;) "by patient continuance in well doing, seeking for glory and honour, and immortality, and eternal life." (Rom. ii. 7.)—This practical religion is continually urged upon us in Scripture, as the best evidence of experimental;—of repentance; (Matt. iii. 8—10; Luke iii. 8—14; xiii. 6—9; Isai. lv. 6, 7; i. 16, 17;)—of faith; (Gal. v. 6; James ii. 1, 8, 14;) of hope; (1 John iii. 3; Heb. vi. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 58;) of love to God; (1 John v. 3;) to Christ; (2 Cor. v. 14, 15; Rom. xiv. 8;) to our brethren in Christ; (1 John iii. 14;) to all men; (Matt. vii. 12; James i. 25—27;) to our enemies; (Matt. v. 43—45; Rom. xii. 19, 20;)—of regeneration, or a new creation; (Eph. ii. 10; Matt. xii. 33; vii. 16—20;)—of sanctification; (Tit. ii. 14; Heb. xiii. 21;)—of being in the way to heaven. (Matt. vii. 21—27; xii. 50; Heb. v. 9; Rev. xxii. 14.)—The decisions of the great day will turn on these evidences being produced or not. (Eccles. xii. 14; Matt. xxv. 40, 45, 46; Rev. xx. 12; James ii. 13; Rev. xxii. 12; Rom. ii. 6—16.)—How sadly defective is their preaching who

insist on doctrinal, or on doctrinal and experimental, while they neglect practical religion! how far are such from declaring “the whole counsel of God!” — —

II. HOW DOES IT APPEAR THAT IT IS OF IMPORTANCE TO DECLARE THIS COUNSEL AT ALL.

The counsel of God, in these several particulars, is the chief subject of all the revelations made to the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets, and communicated by them to mankind. (1 Pet. i. 10—12.) — —

It was the sole subject of the ministry of the Apostles and Evangelists, and first servants of Christ (1 Pet. i. 12.)—And to testify these things, they were to give up all their honour and property; their liberty and life; and to endure all manner of ill usage, cruelty, and torture. (Phil. iii. 7, 8; 2 Tim. i. 8, 12; and especially, Acts xx. 22—24) — —

These things engross the thoughts and engage the ministry of angels. (1 Pet. i. 12; Heb. i. 14.) — —

To bear witness to these truths, to procure these graces and privileges for us, to inculcate these duties, and strengthen us under, and carry us through, these dangers and sufferings, and, finally, to bring us to his eternal glory, the Son of God became incarnate, (Phil. ii. 6—9,) lived, suffered, died, rose, ascended, intercedes, and governs, the affairs of men and angels, of individuals, families, and kingdoms. — —

God hath borne witness to the importance of these things, by “signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost,” (Heb. ii. 4,) from the beginning, hitherto, under every dispensation,—in Egypt, —Canaan,—Babylon,—from Sinai,—and Sion. — —

For the sake of these things the Church, nay, and the world, was built, and is supported. And whatever individual, or family, or town, or country, or empire, rejects, or even neglects these things shall be destroyed, here or hereafter, or both. (Acts iii. 23; Heb. xii. 25; ii. 1—3; x. 26—31; Isai. lx. 12.) — —

This leads me to consider,

III. WHAT IS THE DUTY OF THOSE TO WHOM THIS COUNSEL OF GOD IS DECLARED.

This is expressed in the words following the text.

• They must “take heed unto themselves” that they neither reject nor neglect what is thus delivered to them, but,—that they consider, understand, and believe these matters of doctrine,—that they experience and enjoy these matters of grace and privilege,—that they comply with, and perform, these matters of duty and practice. — —

They must be awake to a sense of the danger there is, lest their minds should be diverted from this “counsel of God,” by the temptations of the Devil, the allurements of the world, the lusts of the flesh, the deceitfulness of sin, or by the “wolves that shall enter in among them,” (ver. 29,) or the “men” that shall arise “speaking perverse things,” (ver. 30,) and against this they must “watch.” — —

They must always “remember” (ver. 31) the vast importance of these things, as manifested by what Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists, Pastors, Teachers, Saints, and Martyrs, and especially what Jesus Christ himself has done and suffered on account

of them; all of whom made these things the great business of their lives. — —

They must be sensible of their own weakness, and must apply “to God,” in earnest and believing prayer, by whose guidance, protection, and blessing, they can alone be preserved, and “to the word of his grace,” in the diligent and faithful use of which, divine grace is increased, and by attending to which as the rule of their faith and practice, as well as the ground of their hope and joy, they will be “built up” in true religion, and finally receive “an inheritance among them that are sanctified” by the Holy Spirit, and thereby are made meet for the glory of heaven. (Ver. 32.)

CXXIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING AND RECEIVING COMPARED.

ACTS XX. 35.

*To remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said,
It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

THESE are the last, and surely not the least important, words of a most solemn charge delivered, I will not say, by a Bishop to the clergy of his diocese, assembled at an appointed visitation; but by an inspired Apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the Pastors and Elders of one of the primitive Churches, who were set apart by the Holy Spirit to feed and oversee that flock which Christ had “purchased with his own blood;”—2

charge, as superior to any given in modern times, as he that delivered it was superior to all modern Bishops, or Ministers of whatever rank.—They are indeed the words of the Lord Jesus, though not recorded in the Gospels, but made known to St. Paul, either by supernatural revelation, according to Christ's promise to his Apostles, that the Holy Spirit should "bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them," (John xiv. 26,) or rather by tradition, from the other Apostles, and, being written in this authentic memoir, by St. Luke, have been happily preserved; for, without doubt, his disciples remembered many of his words, not contained in the writings of the Evangelists. Considering the connection in which they stand in this apostolical charge to the Elders of the Church of Ephesus, they must appear peculiarly weighty and important.—

Consider we,

I. THE BLESSEDNESS OF RECEIVING.

Our Lord does not mean, that "blessedness," or (as the original signifies) *happiness*, belongs to all who receive gifts. For if they do not want what they receive, if they do not make a proper use of it, and, especially, if the corruption of their nature, as their covetousness, pride of heart, self-indulgence, sloth, extravagance, be increased thereby, it becomes a curse and not a blessing; a mean of misery and not of happiness. But where the reverse of this is true, and the gift is really needed, properly used, and produces no injurious effects, a blessedness attends "receiving" in the following respects.

The wants of such as receive being supplied, their trials, troubles, and miseries are, in that proportion, lessened.—Being helped in particular instances, and perhaps extricated out of great difficulties, they often become useful members of society in future, and are rather helpful than needy.—Hereby they are taught, in many cases, that, although God was pleased to reduce them to want, and bring them into indigent circumstances for their correction, trial, or purification, he neither overlooks nor forgets them, but that his Providence watches over them for good, and raises them up friends in the time of need; which lays a foundation for humiliation before God, and confidence in him.—Hereby they have proofs of the humanity of their fellow-creatures, if those who receive them be merely natural men; and of their Christian love, if they be disciples of Christ, who gave to them. In the former case, the social affections are excited, and in the latter, perhaps, a return of Christian love.—The Gospel is thus recommended to them, and they are often induced to pay regard to it, and are preserved or even rescued from infidelity and vice.—Nay, probably, religion is rendered amiable in their eyes, and they are won over to God and his people;—or, if previously pious, their gratitude and love to God and man are greatly increased, and every grace and virtue connected therewith. (2 Cor. ix. 1.).—Being by the supply of their wants in a great degree freed from anxious cares, they are enabled to wait on the Lord without distraction, to be more useful to those dependant upon them and to others.—By all these things their happiness in time, and their reward in eternity,

are greatly increased.—So that it is even blessed to “receive.”

II. THE SUPERIOR BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING.

It is supposed that we give what is our own, and not another's.—We then comply with the Divine will in a most important and capital point, (Matt. v. 42; Luke vi. 30—36,) and “blessed,” we are informed, “are they who do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life;” (Rev. xxii. 14;) and we peculiarly please God; (Heb. xiii. 16:) that is, supposing other things, such as continuing in sin and unbelief, do not hinder.—We greatly benefit our fellow-creatures, as we have seen under the former head; (Tit. iii. 8;) and in so doing, if we be rightly disposed, and possessed of benevolent affections, we must have peculiar pleasure and satisfaction.—We imitate those beings, of all others most worthy of imitation, and become like them; that is, like saints, angels, nay, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit of grace; we become godlike. He *gives*, but does not *receive*; and how inestimable are the blessings which God, Christ, the Holy Spirit have given! — —

In this way we peculiarly glorify God. (John xv. 8; Matt. v. 16; Phil. i. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 11, 12; 2 Cor. ix. 12.) We make suitable returns to God for his goodness to us in our creation and preservation, and to the Lord Jesus for our redemption and salvation. It is impossible, indeed, to recompense God; our goodness cannot extend to him, but he has left the poor always with us, and has deputed them to receive the returns we ought and wish to make.—We make a right use of God's

gifts to us, and the talents he has entrusted with us, as stewards. Having “freely received.” we “freely give.” Therefore these gifts and talents shall be continued and increased. “To him that hath shall be given.” (Matt. xiii. 12.)—We thus answer, in a most important particular, the end of God’s dispensations towards us, whether of creation, providence or grace; Of creation, (Acts xvii. 26,) for we are made of one blood, that being nearly related, we might give one to another food, clothing, and other necessary things, and thus relieve and aid each other; Of preservation, (Luke xiii. 6—9; iii. 9; Matt. iii. 10;) Of providence, in placing us in a situation to be useful; Of redemption; (Tit. ii. 14;) Of illumination by the Gospel; (1 Pet. ii. 9, 10; Eph. v. 8, 9; Col. i. 9, 10;) Of justification; (Tit. iii. 7, 8;) Of regeneration; (Eph. ii. 10;) Of our being made members of the visible Church, and united to Christ and his people. (John xv. 1, 2; Heb. x, 24, 25.)—We give one very important, and perhaps the surest proof of our subjection to, and being benefited by, the Gospel of Christ. (2 Cor. ix. 13.) For we thus manifest our repentance; (Matt. iii. 8; Luke iii. 8—11;) and if this proof be wanting in those that have ability, repentance is but a name; our faith, (Jam. ii. 14—20;) our hope of a future reward; (1 Cor. xv. 58; Heb. vi. 10; Gal. vi. 9;) our love to God and Christ; (1 John iii. 16, 17; John xiv. 21;) and to the people of God and mankind, and even to our enemies; (Matt. v. 44—48; Rom. xii. 20,) we thus show our interest and union with Christ; (John xv. 5;) our victory over, and deadness to the world; our self-denial, particularly in regard to the love of money, honour, and pleasure.—By willingly communicating of what we have received, therefore,

we give one striking proof, (our spirit and conduct in other things not contradicting it,) that we possess true religion; (Jam. i. 27; are the genuine disciples of Christ; (John xiii. 34, 35;) are passed from death to life, and in the way to eternal life; for our acquittance at the day of judgment will turn very much on this hinge. (Matt. xxv. 30; vii. 21—27.)—Hereby, it may be added, we engage the prayers of those we relieve in our behalf; and if they be the people of God, their prayers shall be heard and answered. (2 Cor. ix. 14.) Having been “merciful,” we “shall obtain mercy;” (Matt. v. 7;) even in the present life, should we fall into want and distress, we shall experience it from man, for “with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again;” but, especially from God, for “blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him,—and

shall be blessed upon the earth; and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies; the Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.” (Psal. xli. 1—3.)—If those whom we have relieved die before us, and were the people of God, “they shall receive,” and welcome “us into everlasting habitations;” (Luke xvi. 9;) or if we die before them, they will witness for us at the judgment-seat of Christ.—By giving cheerfully, as the Lord wills, we “sow to the Spirit;” (Gal. vi. 7, 8; 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7;) we “lend to the Lord,” what he will certainly repay with interest; (Prov. xix. 17;) we “lay up treasure in heaven,” (Matt. vi. 19, 20.) “lay up a good foundation against the time to come,” (1 Tim. vi. 17—19,) and our reward will be in proportion, and most glorious. —

In these, and in many more respects which might be mentioned, "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" for none of these advantages and blessings apply to "receiving."

III. THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING THESE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS, AND HOW, AND FOR WHAT END WE OUGHT TO REMEMBER THEM.

They are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of man: and they will be recommended to our attention if we consider—The dignity of his person. If the Israelites heard with respect and obedience the word communicated by angels and Moses, shall not we hear him? (Heb. ii. 2—5; x. 28, 29; xii. 25.) The Father from heaven hath commanded us to hear him. (Matt. xvii. 5.)—His great condescension and love to us, manifested in his incarnation, life, sufferings, and death.—The very near relations in which he stands to us, as our immediate Creator, Preserver, Kinsman, Friend, Brother, Husband.—The offices he sustains, and the characters he bears on our account, and by which we are brought under infinite obligations.—That he is our appointed Lawgiver and Judge, by whom our final sentence will be pronounced; and such words as these shall judge us at the last day, and determine our state and condition for ever. (Matt. xxv. 31, &c.

Hence they are infallibly true, being the words of him who was *Truth* itself, and was incarnated to teach us "the Truth." (John xviii. 37.) In remembering them, we shall not, as we often do, remember what is false and erroneous. —

They are infinitely wise: in remembering them, we shall not remember what is foolish. He was the Divine wisdom and Word of God incarnate.—

They are infinitely kind; and for our good in both worlds. He is love incarnate. In remembering them, we shall not remember what will be for our hurt, but for our real and eternal good.—

They are infinitely important, useful, and necessary—To induce and enable us to counteract our covetousness, ambition, love of pleasure, and not to lay out our money in gratifying the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life, which should be laid out in relieving and procuring the necessities of life for the indigent—To incline and enable us to sympathize with, and to do good to, our fellow-creatures and fellow Christians in distress—To induce us thus to glorify God, adorn his Gospel, recommend religion, reform, and renew the earth in righteousness, and thereby to increase our eternal reward. Well might the Apostle, when he had uttered these words, kneel down and pray with them all.—

For it concerns all to remember these words; both those that receive, that they may know wherein the blessedness of receiving consists:—those that give, that they may be sensible of their superior advantage, and may improve it accordingly;—and of the latter, even those who, labouring, ought to support the weak, (*ασθενεσιν τε ων,*) the sick, or infirm, or such as cannot support themselves. (Text, and ver. 34.)—It is not, therefore, the rich only that are concerned in this point.—

And all must remember these words so as thoroughly to consider, understand, have them in recollection on all occasions, as a motive and incitement to do their

duty; so as to be influenced by them, and to reduce them to practice from time to time. — —

CXXIV.

THE EFFECT OF ST. PAUL'S REASONING WITH FELIX.

ACTS XXIV. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

IN the preceding verses, we find Paul standing before the Roman Governor, Felix, accused at the instigation of the Jewish high priests and elders, by a certain orator named Tertullus, of three great crimes: sedition, heresy, and profanation of the temple. But as soon as he is permitted to speak in his defence, he fully vindicates himself from them all, replying in order to each of the charges which Tertullus had preferred against him; and repelling them so much to the satisfaction of Felix, that he would not gratify the Jews in passing judgment upon him. As to the *first*, he suggests that he had not been long enough at Jerusalem to form any seditious party, or attempt an insurrection; (for it was but twelve days since he had went up to Jerusalem, five of which he had been at Cæsarea; after leaving that city, one or two were spent in his journey from thence, and most of the rest he had been confined at Jerusalem;) and he challenges them to produce, in

fact, any evidence of such practices. (ver. 11—13.) As to the *second*, he confesses himself to be a Christian, but maintains this to be a religion perfectly agreeable to the law and the prophets, and therefore deserving a candid reception. (ver. 14—16.) And as to *profaning the temple*, he observes, that he had been found there “purified,” performing such things as the law required, and behaving in every respect in a most peaceful and regular manner, so that his innocence had been manifest even before the Sanhedrim, where the authors of the tumult did not dare to appear against him. (Ver. 17—21.)

When the Governor had heard the orator's accusation, and the prisoner's defence, “having more perfect knowledge of that way;” (*ακριβέστερον εἰδὼς τὰ περὶ τῆς ὁδοῦ*;) *having known more perfectly the things concerning the way*; or sect to which Paul belonged;—a more perfect knowledge of Jesus and his disciples, than had been given him by the high-priest, the elders, and their orator, and knowing it not to be so mischievous a thing as they suggested, “he deferred them.” But though Felix did not find any crime proved against Paul, he did not acquit him, being afraid of displeasing the Jews. As, however, he was convinced of his innocence, he ordered that he should not be confined too closely; but that his acquaintance should be allowed to visit him, and supply him with any thing which might promote his comfort; a liberty which the brethren of Cæsarea doubtless made good use of during the Apostle's imprisonment in that city.

Now after Paul had been kept a certain time in this lenient confinement, Felix, who had been absent a short time, came again to Cæsarea, “with his wife

Drusilla, which was a Jewess;”* and it seems, that to gratify her curiosity, who was desirous of seeing and hearing so extraordinary a man, as well as to learn himself, from Paul’s own mouth, what were the principles of his religion, Felix “sent for him, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” But being well acquainted with the character and actions of his illustrious hearers, the Apostle took care to introduce into his discourse such topics as were most suited to their particular case; “he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” To persons so unjust, lewd, and otherwise wicked, Paul very properly discoursed on the virtues here mentioned; for he knew that it would be to little purpose to address them on other subjects of Christianity, as those of redemption and salvation through Christ, till they were sensible of their sins, and resolved to forsake them. And it was with equal propriety that he spoke on a judgment to come, where Felix could not hope to escape unpunished, however he might do so on earth† And it is no wonder

* It appears from Josephus, that Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa, and the sister of that Agrippa who is mentioned ch. xxv. 13. She had been married to Azizus, king of Emessa: but Felix, struck with her great beauty, by means of a wicked Jew, named Simon, who professed himself a magician, persuaded her to abandon her husband, and marry him; when she did, though Azizus had but a little before submitted to circumcision, and so embraced Judaism, as the condition required, in order to his marrying her. Josephus adds, that she was afterwards consumed, together with a son she had by Felix, in a terrible eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

† Of Felix, Tacitus relates, *per omnem servitium et libidinem jus regium servili ingenio exercuit*, “he practised all cruelty, at least, in his government;” and it appears, that Drusilla, though a Jewess, was not less wicked, transgressing, as Josephus observes, both the laws of her country, in marrying a heathen, and the laws of God, in forsaking her own husband, and living in adultery with Felix.

that he trembled; it would have been happy for him, if he had yielded to the convictions now produced in his conscience, and been careful to pursue the views opening upon his mind; but, like thousands, he deferred the consideration of them to a season which never came. Satan has three grand devices, whereby he endeavours to prevent the influence and success of the Word on those who hear it. First, he endeavours to persuade them that the doctrine they hear is false; Secondly. that, if true, it is of no consequence, being only the notions or whims of a certain party or description of people; and in the third place, if it be both true and important, yet that it may as well or better be regarded hereafter, at some more "convenient season." These devices prevail with many; with some the *first*. They doubt the truth of what they hear, not so much through want of a capacity to distinguish between truth and falsehood, as through want of attention while hearing, and not searching the Scriptures with meditation and prayer afterwards. With more the *second*: and that for the same reasons, and because they indulge a thoughtless disposition, which lays nothing to heart, and are buried in business and care, or given to pleasure and amusement. With most the *third*; chiefly because they have taken up a mistaken view of religion, thinking it to be that melancholy thing which it is not, or because they are conscious of an attachment to those sins and pleasures which are inconsistent with it. Hence they reply to the convictions produced in them by the faithful preaching of the Word, what Felix said to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."

In order to apply a remedy in these cases, permit me to consider,

I. THE SUBJECTS OF THE APOSTLE'S DISCOURSE BEFORE FELIX.

They may be said to include a perfect system of experimental and practical religion.

RIGHTEOUSNESS.—(*δικαιοσύνη*.) Some think the word should here be rendered *justice*, and doubtless it sometimes means the temper and conduct which we owe to our neighbour; especially when distinguished from godliness, as it is Tit. ii. 12; or from holiness, as in Luke i. 75; Eph. iv. 24; and it may chiefly have that meaning in this passage. Thus it includes truth, justice, and mercy in our outward actions, as well as the inward dispositions from which they flow, as meekness, long-suffering, love.—As Felix was far from possessing this righteousness, being false, perfidious, unjust, oppressive, cruel, and actuated by malevolent and angry passions; no doubt the Apostle would insist on it, and especially on justice and mercy, in which he was chiefly wanting, and which were least of all to be dispensed with in a magistrate. — —

But it is said, (ver. 24,) he “heard” the Apostle discourse “concerning the faith in Christ,” which expression, though it may imply no more than that he heard him declare what the Christians believed concerning Jesus, as that he was the long-expected Messiah, and was proved to be so by God’s raising him from the dead; yet it seems to countenance the opinion, that St. Paul discoursed on “righteousness” taken in its more extensive sense.—He would probably show

him his want of righteousness, and that both towards God and man; that he and all mankind had failed in their duty to their fellow creatures, and had, more or less, violated the laws of truth, equity, and mercy, outwardly, as well as discovered a want of meekness, long-suffering, and love, inwardly; and also in their duty to God, had sinned and come short of his glory, and were guilty before him, had broken his laws, and were involved in the curse of them; were unholy, unlike to God, and unfit to dwell with him. And is not this the case with you? — He would show him the necessity of that righteousness, revealed in the Gospel; of the imputation of righteousness, or of justification before God; (Rom. iii. 24, 25;) of regeneration, sanctification, and a conformity to God; (Eph. iv. 22—24; Col. iii. 9, 10;) of practical obedience to his laws, and compliance with enjoined duties to God and man. (1 John iii. 7.) Without these we can have no share in the kingdom of God here or hereafter. (1 Cor. vi. 9.) — They are necessary for *you*. — He would likewise display the excellence and happy effects of this righteousness *here*; (Psal. xxxiv. 15, 17, 19; 1 Pet. iii. 12, 13; Isai iii. 10; xxxii. 17;) and hereafter. (Rom. v. 21.)—Have you considered this?—Nor would he forget the way of attaining this righteousness; that it is through Christ; (Jer. xxiii. 6; Rom. x. 4; 1 Cor. i. 30;) by faith in Christ; (Gal. ii. 16; Acts xxvi. 18; Phil. iii. 8, 9,) and in the promises. (Rom. iv. 5, 16, 24; 2 Pet. i. 4.)—This righteousness is *towards God* and our fellow-creatures.

TEMPERANCE; (*ἐγκρατεία*;) to ourselves, in our use of the inferior creatures.—As to its nature, it consists in the due subjection and government of the body, its

members and senses, appetites and passions; including sobriety, continence, and chastity, in which both Felix and his lady had trespassed in their marriage.—In the proper use of all God's creatures, and not the abuse of them, using them with moderation, not idolizing them, nor resting in them, being led to the Creator by them. This would be strange doctrine to Felix. Is it not also to you? — — The excellency and necessity of temperance is seen, whether we regard the good of our family, the health of our body, the peace of our mind, the favour of God, or the edification of our neighbour; whether we regard justice to the creatures, gratitude to God for the loan or gift of them, or our own good here or hereafter. — —

These subjects receive a powerful sanction and force from the consideration of,

A JUDGMENT TO COME; (του κριματος του μελλοντος εσεσθαι;) *the judgment which is about to be.* It is certain that there will be a future judgment from Scripture; (ch. xvii. 31; 2 Cor. v. 10; Rev. xx. 12;)—from reason, by which we are informed that virtue and piety ought to be rewarded, and vice and wickedness punished; but here, too often, wicked men prosper, and good men are afflicted; that there should be a distinction between good and bad men, which cannot be perfectly done in this life; (Matt. xxv. 32;)—from our conscience, condemning us, and creating in us fears and forebodings of a future judgment, or approving our actions, and filling us with confidence and peace, as we do ill or well.—It will be universal. “All must appear before the judgment seat;” the great and small; “the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the mighty men, and every bondman,

and every freeman," must stand on equal footing to answer before God. (2 Cor. v. 10; Rev. i. 7; vi. 15; xx. 12.)—The solemnity of this trial is manifest from the circumstances which will precede it: as, the Lord Jesus descending in clouds of heaven, "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God," awakening those that slumber in the grave; all the dead arising in bodies immortal, and glorious or terrible, according to their previous character; "those that are alive" being changed; and the righteous caught up together with their brethren, to "meet the Lord in the air;" the heavens passing away with a great noise, the earth burned up. (Rev. i. 7; 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17; 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; John v. 28; 2 Pet. iii. 10.)—It will be manifest from the circumstances which will accompany it; the august and glorious Judge, being the God-man, Christ Jesus, (Psal. l. 6; John v. 22—27,) revealed "in his (own) glory, and in the glory of his Father." (Matt. xxv. 31.) According to Scripture imagery, he will be clothed with a "garment white as snow, and the hair of his head will be like the pure wool;" his eyes will be as a flame of fire, his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, his voice as the sound of many waters,—and his countenance as the sun shining in his strength. (Dan. vii. 9, 10; Rev. i. 13—16.) He will be seated on "a great white throne;" such inexpressible majesty appearing in his countenance, that "the earth and heaven shall flee away" from before him. (Rev. xx. 11.) His attendants will be "all the holy angels,"—"thousand and thousands minister unto him, ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him." (Dan. vii. 10; Matt. xxv. 31.) The general assemblage of all God's rational creatures, not only all the sons of Adam, but the fallen angels, principalities and powers. (2 Pet. ii. 4.)

“For lo! her twice ten thousand gates thrown wide,
As thrice from Indus to the frozen pole,
Pour forth their myriads. Potentates and powers,
Of light, of darkness, in a middle field,
Wide as creation, populous as wide;
A neutral region! There to mark th’ event
Of that great drama, whose preceding scenes
Detain’d them close spectators through a length
Of ages, rip’ning to the grand result;
Ages, as yet unnumber’d but by God,
Who now, pronouncing sentence, vindicates
The rights of virtue, and his own renown.”

Observe the strict process of this judgment. (Eccles. xii. 14; Rom. ii. 16; Matt. xii. 36; x. 15.) It will make inquiry into our actions, words, thoughts; the time and talents we have been entrusted with, and the use we have made of them. None will be acquitted, but those whose names are written in the Book of Life; those who are rewarded, will have their reward proportioned to their works; and those who are punished, will also be punished according to *their* works. — —

Observe the consequence of judgment. (Matt. xxv. 46; xiii. 48, 49.) — —

“Eternity, the various sentence past,
Assigns the sever’d throng distinct abodes,
Sulphureous or ambrosial; what ensues?
The deed predominant! The deed of deeds!
Which makes a hell of hell, a heaven of heaven.
The Goddess, with determin’d aspect, turns
Her adamantine keys, enormous size,
Through destiny’s inextricable wards,
Deep driving every bolt, on both their fates.
Then, from the crystal battlements of heaven,
Down, down she hurls it, through the dark profound,
Ten thousand thousand fathom; there to rust,
And ne’er unlock her resolution more.”

II. THE EFFECT THE APOSTLE'S REASONING HAD UPON FELIX, AND HIS CONDUCT AFTERWARDS.

“Felix trembled;” (εμφοβος γενομενος;) *was terrified.* He was convinced the Apostle’s doctrine was true and deeply important. And are not you convinced of this? He was condemned by it, being conscious he was unrighteous, intemperate, and unprepared for judgment. Are you prepared? — Hence he was in terror and distress, from a sense of past guilt and present depravity, and foreboding fear and dread of future wrath. We do not find, however, that Drusilla, though a Jewess, was thus alarmed. She had been used to hear of a future judgment; perhaps also, she trusted in being a daughter of Abraham, or to the expiations of the law, and thus was proof against the convictions which seized on her husband, though a heathen. —

But we must notice his conduct subsequent. He answered, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee:” (καιρον μεταλαβων,) *I will take some future opportunity to call for thee.* Now what *ought* Felix’s conduct to have been? He should have sought and exercised repentance for his sins, including a just sense of them, a true sorrow for them, and firm resolution to forsake them. He should have made an immediate application for pardoning mercy and renewing grace, and he should have begged the further help of the Apostle’s instructions and prayers. But what *was* his conduct? He strived to get rid of the terror, and cause of it together, by dismissing the Apostle, and forgetting the awful truths he had been inculcating; vainly expecting to

find, and depending upon finding a more convenient season. His conduct was *wicked*. This was God's time, but *he* defers to another time; God's command was "*To-day*," "*now*;" he says, "*To-morrow*," "*here-after*." Thus God and the messenger of God must stand aside till he has pursued his lusts a little longer. His conduct was *foolish*. If he never meant to repent, it was so in the highest degree; it would be his everlasting undoing. If ever he did mean to repent, this was the best time; now right and blessed views were opening upon his mind; the Lord was waiting to be gracious; the Spirit was working in him, which might never be the case again. The longer he delayed, the work would be more difficult; he would contract a greater load of guilt; his corruptions would gain greater strength; he would be more hardened, and feel less inclination to repentance. And if ever he should turn to God in future, and find mercy of him, yet, through his delay and loss of time, his reward would be less in heaven.—The delay was *dangerous*. He knew not that he should live to see a more convenient season, or any season; but if he should, mercy now rejected, might never more be offered; the Spirit might no more strive with him —It was not only dangerous, but *destructive*; a more convenient season never came; he heard again, but trembled not, and was terrified no more. Nor did he forsake his bad practices, but, it appears, continued in them as long as his government lasted. —

CONCLUSION.

Let us be taught by the example of Drusilla and Felix, to guard against all such false dependances, as

tend to elude or counteract the benefit that might be produced in us by the faithful preaching of the Word of God.—Let us stop our ears against those messengers of Satan, though appearing as angels of light, who would teach us to reconcile the hope of salvation with a corrupt heart or an unholy life.—Let us think how many damned souls will lament, with unavailing sorrow, the neglect of such opportunities as we, perhaps, now possess! — —

CXXV.

COMMISSION OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.

ACTS XXVI. 17, 18.

I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

AMONG the many incontrovertible evidences with which we are furnished of the truth and importance of Christianity, there are four which bear a peculiarly prominent aspect. I mean,—that arising from the accomplishment of prophecy; that is, both the ancient predictions concerning the person and offices, the incarnation, life and sufferings, the death and resurrection, the doctrine and miracles, the humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah, so exactly accomplished in him, and his own predictions with those of his Apostles—That arising from his miracles and those of his

Apostles—That from his own resurrection from the dead, which, as affording a demonstration of the truth of Christianity, has been very ably handled by Gilbert West, and in an excellent little Tract, written by Bishop Sherlock, termed “*The Trial of the Witnesses*,”—and, lastly, that from the conversion of St. Paul; an admirable event brought about by such means, and producing such effects upon his character, and the whole of his subsequent life, as to afford the most striking vindication of the truth of the Gospel, as hath been shown in the masterly “*Observations*” written on this subject, by the late Lord Lyttleton.* Indeed so important was the conversion of this Apostle deemed by the Holy Ghost, that he inspired the sacred penman to record three very circumstantial accounts of it, one given by the author of this book, (ch. ix.) and two by St. Paul himself, and found in ch. xxii and in this from which our text is taken. This last account is contained in the Apostle’s vindication of himself, when accused by the Jews before Festus, the Roman Governor, and in the presence of King Agrippa, the son of Herod Agrip-

* This tract was written, it appears, at the desire of Gilbert West, to whom it is addressed as a Letter, in consequence of Lord, then Mr. Lyttleton, having observed, that besides all other proofs of the Christian religion, which might be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament; from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of Judaism, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidences given of his resurrection by all the other Apostles, he thought the conversion of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was a sufficient demonstration of the truth of Christianity. Mr. West was struck with the thought, and assured his friend that so compendious a proof would be of great use to convince those unbelievers that would not attend to a longer series of arguments; and time has shown that he was not mistaken in his conjecture, as the Tract is esteemed one of the best defences of Christianity which has hitherto been published.

pa, (mentioned ch. xii. 1,) and grandson of Aristobulus, the son of Herod the Great.

St. Paul's Epistles were all written and published within thirty-four years of the death of Christ. In them he continually appeals to all that knew him respecting his manner of life from a child; how he had once persecuted the Christians unto imprisonment and death; how his views and conduct were changed, and that he "preached the faith which he before destroyed." These Epistles are all acknowledged to be his, and are quoted in passages innumerable, by the Fathers of the Christian church, from the first century downwards. And surely no man of common sense would have made such appeals to his contemporaries for the truth of these things, if they had not been true. He also appeals to them concerning the miracles which God did by him, and uttered and recorded many predictions which were afterwards accomplished. —

We learn from hence that the end and design of his conversion was not only, nor chiefly, his own salvation; but in order to his mission for the conversion of others, especially the Gentiles of Greece and Rome; for which work he was abundantly qualified, not only by his supernatural illumination, and his attainments in grace, but by his great natural abilities, and acquaintance with Jewish and Grecian literature.* And we may

* As St. Paul was distinguished before his conversion for the enmity and violence with which he persecuted the Church of Christ, so he was equally distinguished afterwards for his persevering labours, and patient sufferings in its cause. The following excellent observations of the late Dr. Paley on the character of this Apostle, cannot fail to interest the reader. "Here we have a man of liberal attainments, and in other respects of sound judgment, who had addicted his life to the service of the Gospel. We see him, in the prosecution

observe that even in our own day, in the conversion of many, God has in view their usefulness to others. —

Let us consider from the words of the text,

I. THE PURPOSES OF ST. PAUL'S MISSION.

It was “to open their eyes.” Although, no doubt, amidst the many other miracles which he performed, the Apostle gave sight to some who were literally blind, yet the words, like those spoken of Christ’s mission, (Isai. xlii 7,) are evidently to be understood of those spiritually blind, through inattention, through unbelief; (2 Cor. iv. 4;) through prejudice, superstition, love of the world, fleshly lusts, wicked habits, and their natural inability, while unawakened and carnal, to understand, relish, and be influenced by holy and heavenly doctrines and duties, privileges and blessings. He opened their eyes partly by means of his miracles, which tended to awaken and engage their attention, and convince them that his mission was from God;—partly by his discourses, informing their understanding and conscience,—partly by his unblameable, holy, and useful life, overcoming their prejudices,—partly by affecting

of his purpose, travelling from country to country, enduring every species of hardship, encountering every extremity of danger, assaulted by the populace, punished by the magistrates, scourged, beat, stoned, left for dead; expecting, wherever he came, a renewal of the same treatment, and the same dangers; yet, when driven from one city, preaching in the next; spending his whole time in the employment, sacrificing to it his pleasures, his ease, his safety; persisting in this course to old age, unaltered by the experience of perverseness, ingratitude, prejudice, desertion; unsubdued by anxiety, want, labour, persecutions; unwearied by long confinement, undismayed by the prospect of death. Such was St. Paul.”—E.

their hearts, and exciting their sympathies with his sufferings. Above all, by being instrumental through his preaching, praying, and the laying on of his hands, of communicating the Holy Ghost. — —

“To turn them from darkness to light.” The heathen, even the learned Greeks and Romans, were in a state of great darkness, *i. e.* ignorance and error, as to spiritual and divine things in general;—As to the unity, spiritual nature, perfections of God, and the relations in which he stands to his rational and immortal offspring.—As to the original dignity and happiness. and the subsequent fall, degradation, and misery of man, through sinfulness, guilt, and loss of the divine favour and Spirit.—As to the necessity, actual existence, person, works, offices, and grace, of a mediator between God and man.—As to their need of salvation, and the way of attaining it.—As to the will of God, and man’s duty in each relation.—As to when and how strength, help, and salvation are to be had.—As to the certainty, and nature, and duration of a future state; a solemn judgment, and its awful consequences.—By the preaching of the Gospel, and the influences of the Spirit, men are translated from this darkness.—In much greater darkness we may say are involved the present heathen, being devoid, in general, of human learning. It is the case also with the Mahomedans, Jews, Papists, and many Protestants! Now missionaries are sent abroad, and ministers are labouring at home to enlighten them. — —

“From the power of Satan unto God.” Satan, who is “the prince of darkness,” “the ruler of the *darkness* of this world,” (Eph. vi. 12,) obtains all his power over mankind through their *ignorance*. Through ignorance

of the true God, they worshipped false gods; through ignorance of his unity, they worshipped a multiplicity of gods, endowed with various and contrary dispositions, powers, and qualities; through ignorance of his spiritual nature, they worshipped images of creatures real or imaginary, formed of gold and silver, wood and stone; (Rom. i. 21—23;) through ignorance of his purity, the rites of their worship were lewd and filthy; through ignorance of his mercy and love, their ceremonies were cruel, as was the offering human sacrifices, even their own children, which not only the nations of Canaan did, but the Tyrians, Sidonians, Carthaginians, and even the polite Greeks; through ignorance of his truth and righteousness, they worshipped by falsehood and fraud. Hence their dreadful corruption of manners. (Rom. i. 24—32.) And through the darkness they are in, Satan has still greater power over the Hindoos, the Negroes, the American Indians, &c. And why did the Jews crucify the Lord of glory? Because they knew him not. (Acts iii. 17; 1 Cor. ii. 8.) Why so many nations embraced the Mahomedan delusions? From the errors with which their minds were blinded. (See Rev. ix. 2, 3.) Whence the superstitions of Popery? Through “giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils,” “after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.” (1 Tim. iv. 1; 2 Thess. ii. 3—9.) And whence is it that among almost all descriptions of persons, even among us, the body is preferred to the soul, the flesh to the spirit, earth to heaven, the world to God, time to eternity; sin, the greatest evil, the worst thing in a devil, to holiness, the greatest good, and the best thing in an angel; Belial, the worst master, to Christ, the best! All this is from darkness,

and the power of Satan exercised thereby. The Gospel, by enlightening men, and bringing them to repentance, by conviction, humiliation, regeneration, rescues them from his power, and brings them to the knowledge, not merely speculative, but experimental and saving, implying the fear and love of God, and obedience to him.

Hence, being "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," they "receive the forgiveness of sins;" being delivered from the dominion of them, they are exempted from their penalty. They do not merit this as a reward or debt, but they receive it as a free gift, the effect of divine mercy and grace; (Titus iii. 4, 5;) obtained through Christ's sacrifice and intercession; (Rom. v. 9, 10;) proclaimed in the Word; (Acts x. 43; xiii. 38, 39;) received by faith in Christ, as it is said in our text, "by faith that is in me," (John iii. 14—18; Gal. ii. 16;) and sealed on the heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit; (Eph. i. 13.) This is the same with justification, and is attended by peace with God, the divine favour, adoption, the Spirit of adoption, deliverance from the fear of death, a lively hope of the heavenly inheritance, gratitude, joy, patience under present trials, purity of heart and life."

"And an inheritance among them which are sanctified."—Sanctification is an internal change wrought by the Holy Ghost, (1 Pet. i. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 13,) by means of the Word, (John xvii. 17,) and faith in Jesus; (see the text and Acts xv. 9.) This implies a deliverance from sin, and from the world, a dedication to God in heart and life, in soul and body, in our faculties and members, our all being employed for him; a conformity

to him, a participation of the divine nature; (2 Pet. i. 4;) and hence walking with God, (Gen. v. 24,) and communion with him, living and walking in his Spirit; (1 John i. 3; Gal. v. 25.) How great is this blessing!—They obtain “an inheritance among the sanctified” here and hereafter, for which the forgiveness of sins, and the sanctification of their nature, qualify and prepare them. Thus they have a lot among the wisest, best, holiest, happiest, the most honourable and blessed of the human race in this world and another; yea, among angels with Christ and God; a felicity and glory infinite and eternal. This is also by faith in Jesus, (John iii. 15; 1 John v. 13,) and through the preaching of the Gospel.— —

From all this we learn,

II. THE INFINITE IMPORTANCE OF HIS MISSION, AND OF THAT OF EVERY TRUE MISSIONARY, AND GOSPEL MINISTER.

These ends never were, and never will be obtained in any other way, than by the preaching of the Gospel. Some few of the heathen had a degree of knowledge and virtue, (Acts x. 35; Rom. i. 19, 20,) and might attain some degree of happiness after death, but not the proper Christian salvation as here set forth.—Hence the command of Christ, that his Gospel should be preached to every creature. (Mark xvi. 15; Matt. xxviii. 19; Luke xxiv. 47.)—Hence this wonderful miracle wrought in the conversion of St. Paul, to “make him a minister, and a witness of the things which he had seen, and of those things, in the which Christ would appear unto him;” (ver. 16;) “a chosen vessel

to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." (ch. ix. 15.)—Hence the great sufferings to which he was exposed in the execution of his office, to which the Lord, well as he loved him, willed him to expose himself, and to endure rather than not to preach the Gospel; (Acts ix. 16.) God set him and the other Apostles forth "as it were appointed to death; for they were made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men."—"They both hungered and thirsted, and were naked, and had no certain dwelling place,—were made as the filth of the earth, and the offscouring of all things." (1 Cor. iv. 9—13.) They "were troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down, always bearing about in their bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." (2 Cor. iv. 8—12.) St. Paul, in particular, willingly "suffered the loss of all things;" (Phil. iii. 7, 8;) and being "in labours more abundant," was also "in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft," &c. (2 Cor. xi. 25—27.) Hence, he did not "count his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus," (Acts xx. 24;) he was "ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts xxi. 13.) Hence, likewise, Christ requires all his disciples, and especially his messengers, to "deny themselves," to "forsake houses, lands," brethren, nay, and their own lives, for his sake and the Gospel. (Matt. xvi. 24; x. 37—39; Luke xiv. 26.)—Nay, the Lord Jesus himself was born and came into the world, lived and died to "bear witness to the truth."—By these things it is evident that he who is the faithful

and true Witness, and the Wisdom and Word of God incarnate, considered the preaching of the Gospel to all descriptions of mankind. especially to the heathen, to be of infinite importance, of unspeakably more importance, than the lives of his most beloved servants; nay, of more importance than his own life. — —

INFERENCES.

What, then, shall we think of those Christians, so called, who, like the Jews in St. Paul's day, forbid the preaching of the Gospel to the heathen? (1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.)—

What must we think of those, who are so attached to their worldly wealth, that they cannot be induced to sacrifice a little of it to promote the salvation of the heathen, when, by giving some of their superfluous money, they might aid and help forward this good work? May not one properly use the words of Peter to such characters, and say, “Thy money perish with thee!”—

What shall we say of those pious young men, whose health permits, and who have reason to think themselves called to missionary work, but are backward to offer themselves to this service?—

And what shall we say of those, who, having set their hands to the plough, look back, and give up such a cause after they have undertaken it?—

CXXVI.

PAUL NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF
CHRIST.

ROMANS I. 16.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

How different had been the views and feelings of the author of this Epistle from those here expressed! The Lord Jesus Christ and his Gospel, with every person and thing connected with them, he once held in most profound contempt and the deepest abhorrence. "I verily thought," said he, "that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison,—and punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." (Acts xxvi. 9—11; xxii. 4, 5.) In another place, he says, "I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious." Such had been Paul's character and such things he had done "ignorantly in unbelief;" (1 Tim. i. 13;) regarding Jesus of Nazareth as an impostor, and his Gospel a system of error and delusion. That which produced a change in his mind, as is well known, was an extraordinary revelation of Jesus, in all his glory, which was made to him as he journeyed to Damascus, in order to bring any of the disciples whom he found there, bound to Jerusalem; the history

of which is given in his defence before Agrippa; (Acts xxvi. 12—18;) also in chap. ix. 1—9. The change then effected in his mind was such, that he became from that time a faithful and diligent servant of him whom he had persecuted, and a zealous preacher of the faith which he had laboured to destroy. (Gal. i. 23.) And Jesus Christ having “counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry,” and giving him such a commission, “immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood, but declared first to them of Damascus and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coast of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” (Acts xxvi. 20.) Considering himself a “debtor to the wise and to the unwise, as much as lay in him, he was ready to preach the Gospel,” as he says “at Rome also,” the imperial city, and the seat of government, of learning, and of politeness. “For,” he adds, “I am not ashamed, &c.” In considering these words, I shall explain,—

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

The Gospel, in the first view of it, is a narrative or history of facts, “concerning Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead;” viz., of his incarnation and life, doctrine and miracles, humiliation and exaltation, sufferings and glory. (Mark i. 1.) The reason why this history is termed “Gospel,” is not chiefly that it

is *God's spell*, or word, or revelation, as the Saxon term, *Gospel*, means. But, according to the meaning of St. Mark's expression, (εὐαγγέλιον) it is *good news*, or *glad tidings*. Thus, when the angel announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds, his words were, (ἰδὲ, εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην,) "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Every part of this narrative is Gospel, or glad tidings.—That God hath fulfilled the promises made to the Fathers, and thereby manifested his power, and love, and faithfulness. and given all nations and ages cause to trust in him, and to believe that what he hath promised he will also perform; That he hath punctually accomplished all the ancient predictions concerning the Messiah, and thereby confirmed and sealed these prophecies, and shown their infinite importance; That he hath given such a demonstration of his love to lost mankind, as to send his only-begotten Son to seek and save them; That this Son of God is a person of such dignity, that he "had glory with the Father before the world was;" was the "brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person;" "so much better than the angels, as he had by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they;" "the Word," that was in the beginning "with God, and was God;" "the Lord." that "in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of his hands:" That this Son of God "was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" (Heb. ii. 14;) That in him the divine and human natures are indissolubly and eternally united, so that the eternal Son of God and Lord of glory, is become our kinsman and brother, is Immanuel, or God with us, and hath

laid open all the riches, glories, and felicities of the divine nature, to the enjoyment of the human, of us who are "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh;" That in his temptation he resisted and conquered all the powers of darkness, who had conquered and enslaved mankind, learned to sympathize with us, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and able to succour the tempted: That he hath instructed us in all the branches of piety and virtue, and in all divine truths, by his doctrine, and confirmed that doctrine by a holy life, extreme sufferings and mighty miracles; That he hath taught us by example as well as precept, "how we ought to walk and to please God." Surely, I say, tidings of these things are glad tidings of great joy to all that understand and believe them! But you know the narrative does not end here. It proceeds to inform us, that "he gave his life a ransom for many, was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities;" that "the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed;" that "he made his soul an offering for sin," and hath put it away by the sacrifice of himself; so that the most guilty may be forgiven, and the most unholy renewed: That he hath overcome death in his resurrection, and obtained for his followers an immortal life, rising "the first fruits of them that sleep." That in his ascension, he "led captivity captive, and received gifts for men," trampled over all his and our enemies, opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, opened an intercourse between earth and heaven, and having purged our sins, for ever sat down at the right hand of God, waiting till his enemies become his footstool; That he now appears in the presence of God as our intercessor,

our advocate, and forerunner; that he is preparing places for us, and will come to judge the world, and receive the righteous to himself. I say, every part of this wonderful story is *Gospel*, and contains "glad tidings of great joy," and that "to all people," who discern, believe, and consider them.

To be more particular: The Gospel has a respect to all the offices sustained by its glorious Author. In reference to his *prophetic* office, as he was the teacher sent by God, it is that system of doctrines, termed by St. Paul, "the form of sound words," "the analogy of faith," "the mystery of faith;" and by St. Jude, "the faith once delivered to the saints." This is the meaning of the term frequently; (see 1 Cor. xv. 1; 1 Thess. i. 5; ii. 2.) I term it a system of doctrines, because they are closely connected together, and cannot be separated from each other. They must all be received, or none; and to leave out its essential truths, is to reduce Christianity to a lean and barren scheme of heathen morals. "I can conceive," said the late Mr. Newton, "a living man without an arm or a leg, but not without a head or a heart;" so there are some truths necessary to vital religion, and which all awakened souls are taught. The doctrines of the Gospel not only suppose and confirm what is taught us by the light of nature, concerning the being and attributes of God, the immortality of the soul, and the essential and eternal difference between virtue and vice; but they afford incomparably clearer light even on these subjects, and add thereto, all needful information concerning subjects which are matters of pure revelation. The discoveries respecting the fall and redemption of mankind, the characters and offices, the love and suf-

ferings of the Redeemer, his humiliation and exaltation, his cross and crown, the nature and necessity of repentance, of faith and holiness, of justification through the merits, and sanctification through the Spirit of the Redeemer; a state of grace here, and glory hereafter are among the articles included in this blessed system of truth, which, because of the clear, full, and satisfactory information it gives us concerning these most momentous and interesting points, is termed, "the day-spring from on high visiting us;" and surely, well deserves the name of "Gospel," or, "glad tidings."—The Gospel will still fully appear to be glad tidings, if we observe that it refers to Christ's *priestly* office, and is, through his mediation, his sacrifice and intercession, an annunciation and offer, made most sincerely and freely, of privileges and blessings, infinite in value, and eternal in duration;—as remission of sins to the guilty and condemned; (Acts xiii. 38;) reconciliation, peace, and friendship with God, to such as had been at enmity, and under his wrath and curse, (Eph. ii. 3; 2 Cor. v. 18; Col. i. 21; Rom. v. 10;) adoption into God's family, (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18; Gal. iv. 4; John i. 12;) the Spirit of adoption, regeneration, and sanctification, (Gal. iv. 6; Acts ii. 38; Luke xi. 13; John vii. 37, 38,) the peculiar care and protection of God; (Psal. xxvii. 5; xci. 1;) all things needful and useful; (Matt. vi. 33; Phil. iv. 19; Heb. iv. 16;) that all things, even affliction and death, shall work for good; (Rom. viii. 28;) communion with God the Father and the Son, through the Spirit; (John xiv. 15—23; 2 Cor. vi. 16; 1 John i. 3;) a title to, meetness for, and foretaste of, everlasting life; for, being justified by grace, we are not only "made heirs, according to the hope of eternal

life," (Tit. iii, 7.) but meet for it: (Col. i. 12; Eph. i. 13, 14;) and hereafter have the full enjoyment of that life.—The Gospel, however, has also a reference to Christ's *kingly* office, and implies the promulgation of a variety of laws or precepts, all holy, just, and good, enforced with the most awful sanctions: with promises of happiness, and threatenings of misery, present and eternal. That this is a part of the Gospel appears from Matt. xxviii. 20, compared with Mark xvi. 15, 16. Hence we read of "obedience to the faith," (Rom. i. 5,) and of "obeying the Gospel." (2 Thess. i. 8.) These laws enjoin repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as terms or conditons necessary to be complied with, in order to our partaking of the forementioned blessings. To such as have experienced these, and are justified, regenerated, and admitted by adoption into the divine family, piety towards God in all its branches, comprehended in loving him "with all our heart;" righteousness towards man, comprehended in the love of our neighbour, truth, justice, mercy; as well as temperance, chastity, purity,—are all necessary. And that even this may appear to be "Gospel," or *glad tidings*, we are assured he will write these laws on the hearts of such as earnestly apply to him. (Jer. xxxi. 33; Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.)

Such is the true Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. WHAT IS SUPPOSED AND IMPLIED IN THE APOSTLE'S DECLARATION, THAT HE WAS NOT ASHAMED OF IT.

It is supposed that many are ashamed of it, and that there are particulars included in, or connected with it,

which, through the infirmity of human nature, might have given occasion to his being ashamed of it.

In this view, I may mention,—The extraordinary, and apparently improbable nature of some of the facts it relates; such as, that Christ had a prior existence before he appeared in our flesh, and was the Son, the only Son, of God; “an *unique*, or only one,” says Dr. Priestley, arguing, that it is highly improbable such an one should visit this earth, and be incarnated in flesh. That he was born of a virgin; discovered such wisdom when a child as astonished the Doctors, though he never learned, knew letters; and “spake as never man spake;” walked on water, calmed the winds and seas with a word; fed five thousand with a few loaves and fishes; made the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear; cured those possessed with devils, and all manner of diseases, and restored the dead to life; though so wise, benevolent, and perfectly innocent, that he should be so despised, persecuted by his countrymen, and put to death; above all, the story of his resurrection from the dead, appeared improbable, (Acts xvii. 32,) and might have given occasion of shame. Indeed the whole story appeared so improbable, especially to the learned Greeks and Romans, that if the Apostles had not known it to be a relation of facts, and those facts of infinite importance; and if God had not sealed his testimony to it by signs and wonders, he might, and no doubt would, have been ashamed of it.—The mysteriousness of many of the doctrines of the Gospel; such as the Divinity of Christ, the Trinity, the incarnation of the Word, the fall of our first parents, and the introduction of sin and death into the world thereby, the expiation of sin by the

sacrifice of the Messiah, justification by faith without the deeds of the law, the whole work of the Spirit in the soul; these and some other doctrines of Christianity, appear so mysterious to mere natural men, who discern not spiritual things, that some, in all ages, have been, and many in this age are, ashamed of them, and have therefore abandoned them, although, in so doing, they abandon great part of the Bible; of the Old as well as of the New Testament.—The greatness and gratuitousness of the privileges and blessings of the Gospel, is another cause why some are ashamed of it. These, many discard as if they were too great and wonderful for sinful man to possess on earth, and as if all were enthusiasts and fanatics that profess to enjoy them, and abounding grace gave encouragement to sin, and did not sufficiently secure the interests of morality. Hence, instead of “submitting themselves to the righteousness of God, they go about to establish their own.” As an extreme opposite to this, many are averse and ashamed to teach, and even to embrace the Gospel on account of the strictness of its precepts: because it requires us to love God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves; to die to sin and this present world, and become spiritual and heavenly in our affections and intentions; to do all to the glory of God; to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily; to mortify the deeds of the body, crucify the flesh with its lusts, and to labour after an entire conformity to the image of God’s Son. These seem hard sayings, and many are ashamed of them. —

It was a still greater cause of shame with respect to the Gospel, in ancient times, that its Author was so poor, despised, and persecuted, and at last crucified

as a malefactor on a cross; and that the Gospel proclaimed this man to be the Maker, Governor, and Saviour of the world, and the final Judge of men and angels, and exhibited him as an object of worship, whom all ought to honour as they honour the Father. "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." (1 Cor. i. 23.)—We may mention, as another cause of shame in the first ages of Christianity, that the professors of this Gospel, and the disciples of this Master, were of the inferior ranks of life, fishermen, tent-makers, tax-gatherers; men without wealth, authority, or power, and most of them without learning. And, in later ages, the poverty and meanness of many of the true followers of Christ, and the almost continual persecution to which they have been exposed in one form or another, has been, and still is, in many countries, a cause of offence and shame. Is it not with some of you? Are you not ashamed of God's truth, and cause, and ways, and of true and genuine religion, because acknowledged and adhered to by many that are poor and mean among men?

Notwithstanding these and such like particulars, essential to, or connected with the Gospel, the Apostle was not ashamed of it; and, accordingly, gave his advice to Timothy; (see 2 Epist. i. 8—12.) Nay, as is implied in his words, he was so far from being ashamed of it, that he esteemed it above every thing in the world, "counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus;" (Phil. iii. 8—10;) he even gloried in it; (Gal. vi. 14; Rom. v. 11;) and in his labours, and sufferings, and persecutions, endured

in endeavouring to spread this Gospel. (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.)

III. THE REASON WHY THE APOSTLE WAS NOT ASHAMED OF THIS GOSPEL, BUT GLORIED IN IT.

“For it is the power of God unto salvation.”—The Apostle may, here, partly refer to that extraordinary display of the divine power which accompanied the preaching and profession of the Gospel in that age, in signs and wonders, and divers miracles, attesting and sealing the certain truth and infinite importance of it; promised by Christ, (Mark xvi. 17, 18,) and spoken of by the Apostles. (Ch. xv. 18, 19.) Since, however, he signifies that this power was exerted in behalf of every “one that believed,” and as we know that all, even in the first ages of Christianity, did not “speak with tongues,” &c., he must rather be understood of that internal and spiritual influence which accompanies the faithful preaching of the Gospel in every age, according to Christ’s promise, (Matt. xxviii. 20,) the fulfilment of which is recorded in Mark xvi. 20.—This power, accompanying the Gospel, rendered it instrumental in enlightening mankind in the knowledge of the true God and his will, in reforming their manners, and in renewing their hearts and dispositions, and rendering them wise, good, holy, and happy, at a time when all other methods, devised and employed for these purposes, had failed. The ignorance, depravity, and guilt of mankind, are shown, Rom. i. ii. iii. And these blessed effects of the faithful preaching of the Gospel have been displayed in every age and nation, and such are its effects in this day, as hundreds,

enlightened, reformed, renewed, and made holy and happy by it, are, and have long been witnesses. It has been from age to age, and still is, the "power of God unto salvation," salvation not merely future but present. (Eph. ii. 8, 9; 2 Tim. i. 9; Tit. iii. 5; 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.)

To dwell a little longer on the nature of this salvation. It is a deliverance from darkness into light. The Apostle says of the Ephesians who were saved; "Ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord;" (ch. v. 8; see also 1 Pet. ii. 9;) from ignorance and folly as to divine things, into knowledge and wisdom, so as to be "children of the light, and of the day," (1 Thess. v. 4, 5; Col. i. 13,) and wise unto eternal salvation.—From guilt, condemnation, and wrath, into justification and peace with God. (Tit. iii. 5; Eph. i. 7; comp. with ii. 8, 9; Col. i. 14.) Hence—from bondage into liberty; man naturally is in bondage to Satan; "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience;" (Eph. ii. 2;) the world; (Gal. i. 4; 1 John v. 5;) the flesh; (Rom. vii. 5, 14, 18, 21, 23, 24;) and this salvation implies liberty in all these respects. From depravity into purity. (Tit. ii. 14; iii. 5—7; Eph. v. 25—27.)—From misery into happiness; from slavish and tormenting fear, anxious care, evil tempers, earthly and sensual affections, into peace, hope, joy, a good conscience, communion with God, and an earnest of heaven.—It is a salvation into future and eternal felicity; to a state of wealth, honour, glory, happiness, unspeakable, and for ever; so great, that when the very first step is taken towards it, there is "joy in heaven." (Luke xv. 7, 10.) — But,—

IV. TO WHOM IS THE GOSPEL THUS "THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION?"

"To every one that believeth."—That believeth what?—The Gospel itself; (Mark xvi. 16; and text;) that is, with a real, and lively, and operative faith; not such as merely credits its story, assents to its doctrines, admires, and professes to desire, its privileges, and complies externally with its precepts and duties; but "believeth with the heart unto righteousness," so as to "make confession with the mouth," although that confession should be followed with the loss of all things, with imprisonment and death: a "faith of the operation of God," (Col. ii. 12,) the "gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8) that "worketh by love." (Gal. v. 6; James ii. 14—26.) To every one, who thus believeth, the Gospel comes "not in word only, but (*ἐν δυνάμει*) in power," we receive the narrative of facts as glad tidings, we experience the efficacy of its doctrines, embrace its privileges, and from faith and love, and a hope of immortality, obey its precepts.—It may be explained "to every one that believeth" *in Christ*: implying a persuasion of his being the Messiah, the Son of God, and Saviour of the world; able and willing "to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him;" applying to him, relying on him, and receiving him.—All such, according to the constant testimony of Scripture, are made partakers of the forementioned branches of salvation; they are translated out of darkness; (1 Pet. ii. 9;) are justified by faith; (Rom. v. 1;) will receive an inheritance among the sanctified; (Acts xxvi. 18;) and have eternal life. (1 John v. 11—13; John iii. 16.)

This faith cometh by hearing. For “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. x. 14.) Hence the infinite importance of preaching the Gospel in order to the salvation of mankind. The Apostle was so certain of this, and impressed with it, that he judged nothing too much to do, and nothing too dear to part with, and nothing too grievous to suffer in order to make known this Gospel. (2 Cor. xi. 23—29; iv. 8, 9; vi. 3; 1 Cor. iv. 9.)

CXXVII.

DIVINE FORBEARANCE AND LONG-SUFFERING NOT TO BE DESPISED.

ROMANS II. 4, 5.

Desisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

THOSE properties of the Deity, which are of the benevolent kind, such as his goodness, mercy, and love, and which have been termed by many his “darling attributes,” certainly hold a most distinguished place, and shine with peculiar lustre, amidst that constellation of perfections which compose the divine character. But while we are persuaded of this, and are encouraged

hereby, notwithstanding our depravity and guilt, to apply to him in prayer, and confide in him for salvation, present and eternal; we must recollect that there is a certain influence which these amiable, and to us, most needful and desirable attributes of God ought to have upon our dispositions and behaviour; and that, if they fail of producing that effect during the time of our continuance in a state of trial, the divine Being will, by and by, present himself to us in a very different character, even in that of an offended Sovereign, and righteous Judge.—To this most awful and alarming truth, the inspired writers bear continual testimony in the Sacred Scriptures; and frequently warn us in the most solemn manner, that he who is properly styled, “the Lord God, merciful and gracious—,” is also “a consuming fire, even a jealous God,” and that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands” of his sin-avenging justice and wrath. Nor is it only in the Old Testament, and amidst the thunders of the Sinaitic covenant, that we meet with such declarations, but in the peaceful Gospel of the Son of God, and amidst the milder glories which beam from Mount Sion. Of this the words just read, considered in connexion with the context, afford a most memorable instance: and, you need not be informed, that there are many others of a similar kind, and those equally alarming, in every book of the New Testament. For, as certainly as the Evangelists and Apostles “preach peace through Jesus Christ,” to penitent and believing sinners, and assure us that “he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy;” so certainly do they testify, that “to those that are contentious and do not obey the truth,” will be rendered “indignation and wrath, tribulation

and anguish," and that "when Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire." they that "know not God, and obey not the Gospel,"—"shall be punished with everlasting destruction." (Ch. ii. 8, 9; 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.) — — God; my brethren, in his great "goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering," has brought us through the varied scenes of our past life, to this moment, while, perhaps, we have hitherto inquired very little into his will concerning us, and have done little more than "cumber the ground."* Does it not concern us now to consider what use we mean to make of his long-suffering? Shall it lead us to repentance and amendment? or, because "sentence on our evil works is not speedily executed," shall our hearts be "fully set in us to do evil?" This, I trust, will not be the case with all; but as it seems likely to be the case with many, who, though spared from month to month, and year to year, have not entered upon a new life, I think it my duty to endeavour to give them faithful reproof and warning, and to demand of such, in the words of my text; "Despisest thou," &c.,— words which ought most seriously to be considered, and laid to heart by us all, and especially by those on whom the divine goodness has hitherto had no proper influence. — — Consider we,

I. THE GOODNESS, FORBEARANCE, AND LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD.

As God is good, infinitely good in himself, and in his own nature; so, his goodness was the cause of the

* If this be the subject of a Discourse on the beginning of the year, the following observations may be readily adapted to the occasion.

universe, and gave birth to every creature, and is still the source of all his dispensations towards men; whether of Providence or Grace. It is true, all his other attributes also were concerned in creating, and are still concerned in governing the world; but it seems they are all under the direction and influence of his goodness and love, of which, indeed, they are but modifications. What is his infinite wisdom, but goodness exerting itself in planning and directing? His infinite power, but goodness in executing and accomplishing that which his wise goodness had designed? His infinite justice, but goodness in governing? or, His infinite purity, and even wrath, but goodness, engaged in watching over, and guarding the good of his whole creation.—And if his goodness gave origin to the universe in general, so did it to man in particular, as he was first formed, that master-piece of divine workmanship; being, as to his spiritual part, a rational and immortal creature, endued with godlike intelligence, liberty, rectitude, and happiness; and placed in a body curiously wrought, furnished with various senses and members most convenient for use, and subservient to instruction and pleasure, and inhabiting a world stored with all kinds of conveniences and delights, with all things needful and useful.—Although, by the fall, we forfeited every blessing our Creator had bestowed upon us, his goodness continues to us many, supports, preserves, and provides richly for us, doing us good, and “giving us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” (Acts xiv. 17.) His goodness is more particularly manifested in our redemption and salvation, in which especially “the kindness and love,” (*χρηστοτης και φιλανθρωπια*,) *the*

goodness and love toward man, “of God our Saviour appeared.” (Tit. iii. 4; John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9.)

The unspeakable extent of his goodness is seen in the dignity of the Person given, and the humiliation and sufferings to which he was given; (Phil. ii. 6—8;) the unworthiness of those for whom he undertook; the great misery from which we are rescued; the happiness to which we are, or may be advanced.—It is manifested in the blessings consequent on our redemption; as in the information afforded by the Gospel, and means of grace: (Luke i. 78;) the enlightening, quickening, renewing, strengthening, and comforting influences of the Holy Spirit; the sincere and free offer of salvation, both present and eternal. — —

As to the influence this goodness of God ought to have upon us; ought it not to humble us, as a much less display of goodness did one of old? (Gen. xxxii. 10;) to fill us with gratitude and love? leading us, as it were, to say,

“O may I breathe no longer than I breathe
Thy praise?”—

inducing us to trust in him for all we need, whether for soul or body; and to give ourselves to his service? (Psal. cxvi. 12; Rom. xii. 1.) — — But, alas! the very contrary is the effect it has upon the generality; yet God bears with them. — — We notice, therefore,—

His **FORBEARANCE**: exercised of old towards the heathen world, amidst their idolatries and vices. (Acts xiv. 15, 16; xvii. 24—31) What an awful picture of these in chap. i. of this Epistle! and what a proof of God’s forbearance, that he should endure those living in them!—Towards the Jews, (ver. 1, 17—24,) whose

perverse and sinful manners he suffered for ages. (Acts xiii. 18; Isai. i. 5.)—Towards sinners and unfruitful professors of all descriptions still; those wilfully ignorant, neglecting the means of instruction: those wilfully or willingly wicked, living in open or secret sin, and though knowing their Master's will, not doing it; false professors, hypocrites, pharisees, formalists, (Isai. lxxv. 2; i. 10,) such as rest contented without christian experience and practice, without repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, salvation: such as leave their first love, and backslide: (Hos. xi. 7—9; Jer. iii. 12:) unfruitful and slothful christians, compared to the "earth drinking in the rain which cometh oft upon it." (Heb. vi. 7, 8.)—He bears with them year after year: but what is the end for which he bears with them? That a reformation may be wrought, and a change take place in all the instances just mentioned.—If there be no alteration, still God is

LONG-SUFFERING, (*μακροθυμος*,) *i. e.* slow to punish. This is the meaning of the word, (Num. xiv. 18,) and is well explained Joel ii. 12, "slow to anger,—and repenteth him of the evil."—

Many instances of this long suffering of God are noticed in Scripture; as, Towards the old world in the days of Noah: (1 Pet. iii. 20; compared with Gen. vi. 3—7; vii. 4:)—Towards the world now: (2 Pet. iii. 7—9:)—Towards particular nations, as Egypt, in the days of Pharaoh: (Gen. xv. 13, 14; Rom. ix. 22:) the Canaanites; (Gen. xv. 16:) the Israelites, in all ages, (Isai. v. 1.) especially in the time of Christ: (Matt. iii. 7—10; Luke xiii. 6—9:)—Towards particular cities, as Sodom, (Gen. xviii. 20,) Nineveh, (Jonah i. 2; iii. 10; iv. 11,) Babylon, Tyre:—Towards churches, that have

left their first love; (Rev. ii. 1—6;) that are lukewarm; (Rev. iii. 15;) that are formal, and dead, and barren; (Rev. iii. 1:)—Towards families, as that of Ahab; (1 Kings xxi. 29;) the house of Stuart, in England; and of Bourbon, in France:—Towards individuals innumerable of all characters, whom God is slow to punish, and even to chastise. (Luke xiii. 7.) — *Consider,—*

II. HOW THESE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, INCLUDED UNDER THE NAME OF (το χρησον) “THE GOODNESS OF GOD,” LEAD, OR SHOULD LEAD, MEN TO REPENTANCE.

By Repentance, we understand *after-thought*, or *reflection*; the looking back upon our former ways, and considering them with a just conviction of our guilt, attended with humiliation, shame, sorrow, and hatred, of all our sinful dispositions, words, and actions. This is the repentance the Jews could not be brought to: (Jer viii. 6:)—It is also a *change of mind*, of all our powers:—It is evidenced by the production of the proper fruits. We repent of known sin, when we break off our sins; of our self-righteousness, when we renounce it; of our inordinate love to the world, when we die to it; of our lukewarmness, when we become earnest in the pursuit of heavenly things; of our formality, when we become alive to God; of our barrenness, when we begin to bear fruit.—Now how does the goodness of God lead men to repentance? His long-suffering leaves room for it, (Rev. ii. 21,) which there would not be, if punishment followed immediately on the heels of transgression. His forbearance, when considered, strongly invites, persuades, and must

move an ingenuous mind.—His goodness and bounty also afford every needful and useful help, as the mediation and intercession of Christ, exalted “a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance;” the call and ministry of the word; the reproofs, exhortations, and warnings, of the servants and people of God; the chastisements and blessings of Providence; the strivings and influences of the Holy Spirit. — —

III. THE REASONS WHY THE GOODNESS OF GOD DOES NOT PRODUCE THAT EFFECT.

These are *ignorance*; “not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” The impenitent are wont to take a pride in their supposed superiority, or knowledge; but their impenitence is really owing to their superior ignorance: ignorance of their fallen state, and of their sinfulness, guilt, and exposure to divine wrath; of the infinite evil of sin, and of God’s hatred to it, and the destructive consequences of it; of the worth and necessity of holiness, and of every branch of the christian salvation; of the true character of God, that he is as holy and just, as he is merciful and gracious; of the dignity of the Redeemer, and of his great love and sufferings, and of the great guilt contracted, and punishment to be incurred, by those who continue to reject and disobey him, or neglect his salvation; of the end of man’s creation, preservation, and redemption; of the infinite importance of this short span of human life, and how much depends on our rightly improving it, as a state of trial, for eternity.—*Hardness*, (σκληροτητα,) or *callousness*, contracted by sinning against light, and

the formation of evil habits. (Eph. iv. 18, 19.)—*An impenitent heart*, (*ἀμετανοήτων*), that is, an inconsiderate, unreflecting, and therefore, unrelenting heart; the neglect, or omission of consideration and reflection, occasions there to be no relenting, nor godly sorrow.—

IV. THE ISSUE IN SUCH A CASE.

They “treasure up unto themselves wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”—There will be *a day of wrath*, in opposition to the *goodness* that now reigns and is displayed.—A day of *revelation*, in opposition to that *forbearance* that now seems to wink at, or overlook men’s sins; for what is now covered, shall then be revealed. (1 Cor. iv. 5; Eccles. xii. 14.)—A day of *revelation of the righteous judgment of God*, in opposition to his long-suffering, which is generally exercised in the present world, but will not be in eternity: (2 Cor. v. 10; ch. ii. 6—16:) then he will not be slow to punish. (Ver. 6.)—Against this day do many prepare for themselves wrath,—accumulated vengeance in return for abused goodness. — —

CXXVIII.

THE SCRIPTURAL VIEW OF A FUTURE JUDGMENT.

ROMANS II. 16.

God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my Gospel.

THE subject of a judgment to come, the consideration of which once even made a Judge to tremble, is generally allowed to be the most awful and striking of any that can be presented before our minds. The circumstances, or events, preceding, accompanying, and following, will be grand and solemn beyond expression; such as the second and glorious coming of Christ, the appointed Judge, in the clouds of heaven, attended with all the holy angels:—the resurrection of all the dead, who shall come forth at the sound of the archangel's trumpet:—the transformation of all the living “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye:”—the general assembly of all God's rational creation, that is, of all mankind, both “small and great;” of all angels, who shall be ministers of divine vengeance, or mercy, and spectators of the scene; of all devils, who shall receive their sentence at this bar:—the conflagration and destruction of the heavens and the earth, which are “reserved unto fire against the day of judgment:”—But this subject is as important as it is awful. The future and general judgment is intended to justify the ways of God to men and angels; to vindicate

his perfections, and illustrate his divine glories: it will raise and establish the honour and interests of piety and virtue for ever. Its importance to us appears in that it will determine our condition to all eternity: hence, though many other subjects may be more pleasing, yet none is more profitable, or better deserving of our more serious attention, or ought to be more seriously laid to heart.—It is set in a most clear light in the text, considered in connexion with the context. — —

Let us consider,—

I. THE GRAND SUBJECT OF INQUIRY AT THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

It is “The secrets of men.”—This phrase is to be understood without any restriction, in its utmost latitude. It comprises the whole conduct of men, all our tempers, words, and works, which are at present a great secret, not only to others, but to ourselves also; not only our public acts and character which are manifest to others, but those things also, which are concealed from them, and known only to God and our own consciences, yea, even things which escape ourselves, or the nature of which may be mistaken, or undiscovered by us. The hypocrite, who either designedly deceived others by false pretences, or flattered himself by delusive hopes, and imagined he was in truth what he appeared to be, shall then be laid open and made manifest. And the good actions of the sincere Christian, which might not only be uncharitably mistaken by the world, but unreasonably censured by his own conscience, shall then be fully vindicated.—The expression used here does not exclude the actions

we have done publickly. God will also judge them: (Eccles. xii. 14:) and they are, in a sense, a secret as to their nature, how bad or how good; (we know little, at best, of the evil of sin, or the value of holiness;) as to their consequences, their influence in promoting virtue or vice, piety or profaneness.—Our *whole deportment*, inward and outward, is comprehended. All our actions, whether natural, civil, or religious, towards God, our neighbour, or ourselves, good or bad, of omission or commission, will be the subject of inquiry in the great day; (Matt. xxv;) that they may be judged, whether they are agreeable or disagreeable to the word, will, and nature of God. Many are at much pains to conceal their actions from others; but how foolish is this, when they are already known to God, (Rev. ii. 2, 13,) and to our conscience; and shall be brought to light at that day.—Our *words*, (Matt. xii. 36; Luke xii. 1—3,) spoken in private or in public; true or false; charitable or uncharitable; profane or devout; trifling or serious; edifying or useless.—Our *motives and ends*. These are very different in the same action, even in those materially good: and according to the motive the action is denominated good or bad. This is the altar that sanctifies the gift: (Matt. vi. 22, 23.) Now these must all be laid open; all the secret inducements, or moving principles, of our words and works. (1 Cor. iv. 5.) And how many, even professors, will be found to have acted from evil, or, at least, mixed motives!—Our *hearts*; our appetites, passions, tempers, imaginations, thoughts, (Eccles. xii. 14; Luke xii. 2,) whether agreeable or contrary to the mind of Christ and the image of God, after which we must be created anew in Christ Jesus.—The use we

have made, or neglected to make, of our *talents*: (Matt. xxv. 14; Luke xix. 12.)—of our *time*; (Eph. v. 16;) we shall be judged for our whole life; not merely a part of it; for all our years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes.—In general, inquiry will be made as to *action*, with respect to our diligence or negligence; (1 Cor. iii. 8;) what we have done, and in what manner:—as to *sufferings*; what we have endured, and in what spirit, whether with resignation and patience towards God, and with meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering towards men. — —

II. THE PERSON BY WHOM THE SECRETS OF MEN WILL BE JUDGED.

“By Jesus Christ.”—It is God who will judge the secrets of men. He alone has *a right* to judge them; it is his law that is broken, the rights of his government that are infringed, his justice that is affronted. He alone *can* judge the secrets of men; none other has power enough to do it, to raise the dead, and to assemble the living; wisdom to know all the individuals, and their actions, words, thoughts, &c.; holiness to hate, and to be displeased sufficiently at sin; justice to pass an equitable sentence.—But though the Father is especially mentioned as the Judge, yet not exclusive of his Word and Spirit. “God shall judge the secrets of men,—*by Jesus Christ*,” the Word made flesh, the man Christ Jesus. (John v. 22; Matt. xxviii. 18; Rev. i. 18; Matt. xvi. 27; xxv. 31; Acts x. 42; xvii. 31; 2 Thess. i. 7.)—This appointment is reasonable, as a reward of his obedience and sufferings. His obedience was perfect, his sufferings extreme, his resignation absolute. It is fit he should be rewarded. If he reward us for

our labours and sufferings, how much more is Christ, who was “made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,” worthy to be “crowned with glory and honour!” Hence, because Christ, “being in the form of God,” so far “humbled himself,” God “hath highly exalted him,”—“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.” (Phil. ii. 6—10.)—This perfect honour is appropriate to Him. The powers of hell employed their force and fraud in opposing the kingdom of Christ, and it is fit he should pass sentence upon them. Foolish men now dare to oppose him, and in the days of his flesh insulted and crucified him, and it is very fit he should judge them. (Rev. xvii. 13, 14.)—With respect to his followers also it is fit that he should acquit them, who bore their sins; that he should determine their happiness, who purchased heaven for them, with its various mansions; that he should present them faultless, who preserved them from falling. The persons to be judged were under his government, while on earth in a state of trial, and he was intimately acquainted with them, with their several and various situations, advantages, helps, &c., and all their behaviour and conduct under them; hence he is well qualified to be their judge. The justice of the sentence to be pronounced, will thus be manifested. Being man, he will be visible; will not appear in terror and thunder, but as one of ourselves; we shall be enabled to speak to him, and plead with him, if we have any thing to offer in palliation of our guilt. (Job xxiii. 3; xxxiii. 5.) Being man, of our own nature, he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities; being God, he is infinite in holiness and justice, and concerned for the honour of the divine Law, and the equity of his Government. — —

III. THE RULE WHEREBY GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN.

See ver. 12—15—The law of innocence, or the covenant of justice, made with man before his fall, is not here meant. No fallen child of man could be saved, if judged by this. For it requires entire perfection in all particulars, in our actions, words, tempers, desires, passions, in our motives and ends, and in our whole spirit and conduct, and that constantly, and to the end of life. This, no man, Heathen, Jew, or Christian, has paid, does or ever will pay.—“The Law of liberty,” or Covenant of grace, made with man since the fall, is here meant. This was intimated to mankind in the original promise, (Gen. iii. 15,) and more fully to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it was made known by tradition in the early ages of the world, and spread obscurely through all nations. By the precepts of Noah, the use of sacrifices, the works of God, (Ch. i. 20,) reason, conscience, the Holy Spirit, (ch. ii. 14, 15,)—God, his nature and attributes, the great outlines of duty to him, and one another, and a future state, were so far made known to them, that they were “without excuse;” as also that sin might be pardoned on repentance, and the sinner renewed and aided.—They were made more clearly and fully known by Moses and the Prophets:—and still more clearly and fully by Christ and his Apostles. —

As to the nature of this Law or Covenant, it supposes that all have sinned in time past, and makes provision, by the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, for pardoning us:—That all are “born in sin” and corrupt, and offers to change us:—That we shall be in

ourselves helpless, and come short of our duty till death, and provides for our continued forgiveness, and the communication of "grace in every time of need."—By this covenant or law, all mankind will be judged, but only according to the dispensation they were under, or the light they had, or might have had, concerning it. (Ver. 12.) Jews, and especially Christians, who have had, or shall have, the greatest advantages, if they shall have improved them, will meet with the greatest reward; (ch. i. 16; ii. 10;) but if they shall have abused them, the greatest condemnation. (Ver. 9.)—According to this covenant of grace, all penitent and believing souls, as accepting of it, termed (ver. 13) "the doers of the law," the Gospel law, "the law of liberty;" as complying with its demands in repentance, faith, love, and obedience, shall be acquitted; having been, while on earth, justified, renewed, and going on to perfection until death.—Yet they shall be judged, and their reward or punishment shall be greater or less, according to their works. — —

INFERENCES.

Will God judge the secrets of men? then let us "judge nothing before the time." (1 Cor. iv. 5.)—In what a different light will many appear in that day, from that in which they appear now!—How necessary to be saved from pride, if we would not awake to shame and everlasting contempt!—How careful should we be to make the Judge our friend! This is possible, by doing his will. (John xv. 14; Matt. vii. 21.)—Are we to be judged by the covenant of grace? and being called Christians, shall we be judged according to the *last* and *best* edition of it? then let us acquaint ourselves

with it, and inquire whether we have accepted of it, and comply with it. (2 Cor. xiii. 5.)—Will our reward be according to our holiness, inward and outward, our usefulness, sufferings patiently endured, &c.? Then let us give diligence to be found not only “in peace,” but, “without spot and blameless;” and let us be “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;” (1 Cor. xv. 58;) and let “patience have her perfect work,” remembering that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.) —

CXXIX.

THE GREAT ADVANTAGE OF POSSESSING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

ROMANS III. 1, 2.

What advantage then hath the Jew?—Much every way: chiefly because unto them were committed the Oracles of God.

THE Apostle, having in the last chapter, proved the Jew equally liable to future punishment with the Gentile, proceeds in this to answer objections that might be urged. It might be asked what advantage it was to be the children of Abraham, and heirs of the promises, &c., if the heathens, who wanted these privileges, were not precluded from salvation. St. Paul here removes the objection, to their greater conviction, by singling the prerogative of the Jew in being favoured

I. THE APPELLATION HERE GIVEN TO THE SCRIPTURES,—THE ORACLES OF GOD.

Although in 1 Kings vi. 19, the Holy of Holies of Solomon's Temple is termed the "Oracle," because there God was wont to meet his people, in their representative the High Priest, and to "commune with them from above the mercy-seat, from between the cherubims;" (Exod. xxv. 22;) yet, when in the New Testament, we find the Scriptures, containing divine revelations, termed "the oracles of God," there seems to be an allusion to the oracles, or pretended revelations, of the heathen gods. For "the word *oracle*, among the heathen, was the answer which their false or devil-gods were supposed to give to those that consulted them upon any affair of importance. The credit of these oracles was so great in those dark and deluded nations and ages, that in all perplexities and disputes, their determinations were held sacred and inviolable. Hence vast numbers flocked to them for advice, and no business of any moment was undertaken, scarce any peace concluded, any war waged, or any new form of government instituted, without the advice or approbation of some oracle." They had, indeed, more regard to the fancied direction of their imaginary gods, than most Christians, so called, to the real and infinitely momentous counsel of the true God. And yet the answers, which were usually given by the intervention of the Priest or Priestess of the gods consulted, were generally expressed in such dark and unintelligible, or in such vague and equivocal phrases as might easily be wrested to prove the truth of the oracles whatever the event might be. These were, indeed, merely pre-

tended, counterfeit, and false communications, from gods only imagined, that had no existence; or they were, perhaps, in some instances real communications from demons or devil-gods, like those by the damsel mentioned Acts xvi. 16.—But the Apostles, when they term the Scriptures, “Oracles,” (see also Acts vii. 38; Heb. v. 12; 1 Pet. iv. 11,) signify that they are real revelations from the true God, just as the heathen oracles were supposed to be from their idols.—The Scriptures are God’s oracles, containing great and important truths, precepts, and promises from Him. Those of the Old Testament only are referred to in the text. These were communicated:—*vivá voce*, as when God spake to Moses face to face:—in visions, as when a prophet in an ecstasy had supernatural revelations: (Gen. xv. 1; xlv. 2; Ezek. xi. 24; Dan. viii. 2:—in dreams, as those of Jacob, (Gen. xxviii. 12,) and Joseph, (xxxvii. 5, 6:—by Urim and Thummim, which was a way of knowing the will of God by the Ephod, or Breastplate, of the High-priest, and was often made use of from Joshua’s time to that of the erection of the temple:—after the building of the temple, God’s will was generally made known by Prophets, divinely inspired, and who were made acquainted with it, in different ways, chiefly by the light of the Holy Spirit, or by visions, as in the case of Ezekiel; or angels, as Daniel. (ch. ix. 20, 21.)

Now all these were real revelations from God. And the Apostles, St. Paul and St. Peter, as also Stephen, when “full of the Holy Ghost,” giving the Scriptures of the Old Testament, in which these revelations are contained, this appellation, show in the clearest manner that they considered them as records, containing

God's very mind and will, or writings given by divine inspiration, which, indeed, they elsewhere assert in plain terms. (2 Tim. iii. 16; 1 Pet. i. 10—13, 23, 25; 2 Pet. i. 19—21.) And these Apostles, being themselves inspired and “guided unto all truth” by the Spirit of Truth, (John xiv. 17, 26; xv. 26; xvi. 13,) could not be mistaken. This we know by the miracles they wrought, and the prophecies they uttered, through and in confirmation of their inspiration.—Christ himself has borne a clear testimony to the truth and importance of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. (John v. 39; x. 35; Luke xvi. 29, 31.)—Other proofs of their inspiration are—the majesty of their style;—the evident truth, purity, simplicity, sublimity, and authority of their doctrines;—the harmony of all their parts;—their power and efficacy on the minds of myriads;—the accomplishment of their prophecies in many past events;—the signs, and wonders, and miracles, performed by those who professed to speak or write them by inspiration.—If these things can be affirmed of the writings of the Old Testament, how much more of the Scriptures of the New, which consist of the very discourses and words of the Son of God, his incarnate truth, wisdom, and word; (Heb. i. 1;) and of his divinely commissioned Evangelists and Apostles, filled with his Holy Spirit. (Eph. iv. 7—13.)

II. THE ADVANTAGES THOSE HAVE ABOVE OTHERS, WHO ARE FAVOURED WITH THE SCRIPTURES.

We must acknowledge that there are many truths, even religious truths, and truths of vast importance, which may be known by what has been termed the light of nature, light issuing from God's works, whether

of creation or providence, and from reason reflecting thereon. (Ch. i. 19, 20.) These seem to demonstrate the existence, the unity, the nature as spiritual and incorruptible, and some of the attributes, of God; also his providence and government over his creatures, their dependance on him, and the accountableness of the intelligent and free part of the creation to him; the difference between virtue and vice, piety and profaneness, which, as they are not rewarded or punished here, must be in a future state of existence.—All these, and some other truths connected with them, appear to us to be plainly discoverable by the light of nature; nevertheless, matter of fact has proved that in all nations under heaven, even as to these most obvious and primary truths, all flesh have corrupted their ways.—If the existence of a Deity has been generally acknowledged, yet his unity, and spiritual and incorruptible nature, has not, but the most learned and polished nations have multiplied their gods without end. (Ch. i. 21—24; hence Isa. xl. 19, 20; xli. 6, 7; xliv. 12—20.) And are modern heathen nations more enlightened?—As to the accountableness of man, fatalism on the one hand, and self-sufficiency on the other, prevailed even among the Greeks and Romans; as to the distinction between vice and virtue, we refer to the Apostle, (Rom. i. 26—32,) and instance especially with respect to sodomy, and the exposition of their own children to death. And how little better is the case of the Hindoos and Africans? And as to a future state of happiness or misery, they were in general “without hope.”*

* On this subject Cicero, who excelled most of the Greeks and Romans, discovers the greatest uncertainty; for he terms his hope of a future existence, “*Futurum quoddam augurium seculorum*,” a kind

But if these and such like truths could have been discovered by the light of nature, they are taught in Scripture much more clearly and distinctly; more fully; with more authority and certainty, being confirmed by unquestionable miracles, and the accomplishment of prophecies: and taught in a way more adapted to the condition and wants of mankind, who in general have neither capacity nor time for deep and difficult research.

Many other truths of equal importance, and immediately connected with our holiness and happiness, and which are not known at all by the light of nature, are clearly revealed to us in the Scriptures. That "God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth;"—that he is absolutely infinite in all his perfections, and eternal, and claims our highest possible esteem, veneration, and reverence;—that there exists in the unity of the Godhead, three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and the Spirit, equally concerned in the creation of man and all things, and demanding equal adoration and praise;—that he created the heaven and the earth out of nothing by the word of his power, by which he still, every moment, upholds them;—that man was at first formed after his image, intelligent, free, active, immortal;—that man

of surmise, or conjecture of future ages. And Seneca, who may properly be ranked next to Cicero, in learning and virtue, referring to a future state, says, "It is that which our wise men promise, but do not prove." Aristotle, one of the Greek philosophers, calls death, "the most terrible of all things;"—"neither good nor evil," as he expresses it, "happening to any man after death." And Socrates himself, justly famed as the wisest and best man of all heathen antiquity, was constrained at his death to speak in the following terms;—"I hope to go hence to good men; but of that I am not very confident; nor doth it become any wise man to be confident that so it will be. I shall now die, and you shall live; but which of us is in the better state, the living or the dead, God only knows.

fell from God by voluntary and unnecessitated transgression, and is become guilty, depraved, weak and wretched;—that God hath so loved fallen man as to give his eternal Word, his only begotten Son, to redeem and save him;—that this Son of God was promised to the Patriarchs, and foretold by the Prophets, and hath actually become incarnate, hath expiated sin by the sacrifice of himself, hath risen from the dead, to show that the sacrifice he hath offered is available, and to appear as our advocate, intercessor, and forerunner in the presence of God;—that he hath obtained pardon, holiness, and heaven, for all that shall repent and believe in him, and grace to enable them to repent and believe:—that he now governs the Church and the world, and will finally judge, and reward or punish, mankind in their whole persons, soul and body, for their improvement or abuse of his salvation;—that as his doctrine assures us of the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body, so his resurrection makes way for, and is a pledge and assurance of ours;—the conflagration and dissolution of the heavens and the earth, and the nature and duration of future happiness and misery: These, and many other truths connected with them, are matters of pure revelation, neither known nor discoverable by the light of nature, but declared in the Oracles of God with the utmost clearness, and on the authority of God himself, who hath sealed them with the blood of his own Son, and confirmed them by his resurrection. and by signs and wonders without end, and predictions accomplished.—From truths revealed pass to precepts enjoined by God himself, respecting his worship and service, every branch of piety and virtue; of godliness, righteousness,

and temperance,—particularly the Ten Commandments, and more especially the two of love to God and all mankind, enjoined expressly, and with the authority of the eternal Lawgiver and final Judge. Nothing of this kind was done by the light of nature, and nothing certain by tradition, or in any writings on earth, but the Divine Oracles.—Observe, also, the promises and threatenings which sanction the precepts, many earnestness of the accomplishment of which we meet with, as in the destruction of the nations of Egypt and Canaan, the captivity of Babylon, the destruction of Tyre, Babylon, Jerusalem, and all the four great empires, and now of mystical Babylon. There are no such promises or threatenings in the light of nature; nor does tradition afford any thing similar.

The Oracles of God may well be called by St. Stephen “lively.” God’s word is a “hammer, and fire,” “quick and powerful,” (Heb. iv. 12,) “spirit and life.” (John vi. 63.) They partake of the spiritual, living, and powerful nature of Him, from whom they proceed, of the source from whence they flow, and are, “light,” “light of life,” &c., “profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness.”—Especially as God, who gave them by inspiration, and sanctioned them in such a glorious manner, is still at hand to give the right understanding and feeling of them, (Luke xxiv. 45; 2 Pet. i. 20,) and still works by and with them. Hence men, from age to age, have been “pricked,” “cut to the heart,” (Acts ii. 37; v. 33,) “begotten,” (Jam. i. 18,) “born again,” (1 Pet. i. 23,) “set free,” (John viii. 32,) “made clean,” (John xv. 3,) “sanctified,” (John xvii. 17; Eph. v. 26,) built up, and made perfect by them, (Eph. iv. 12;

2 Tim. iii. 15:)—But here arises a grand objection; the Jews, though favoured with the Oracles of God, were as wicked as the Gentiles, (Rom. ii:)—professing Christians are as wicked as the Heathen. This is by no means the case: A very favourable change in the manners of men in general has been wrought, where the Scriptures, especially those of the New Testament, have been received; and myriads, both Jews and Christians, have thereby been made truly pious persons in all ages: and with respect to the rest “if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” (Ver. 3.) This leads me to show—

III. THE OBLIGATION WHICH LIES UPON SUCH AS POSSESS THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, TO IMPROVE THIS ADVANTAGE FOR THEMSELVES, AND TO COMMUNICATE IT, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, TO OTHERS.

The Oracles of God can only profit those who believe them; (Heb. iii. 19; iv. 2;) but it is not required to believe without evidence, and evidence perfectly sufficient. The Scriptures must also be considered and laid to heart; otherwise, in the nature of things, they cannot profit an intelligent and free being: for they do not work upon our minds mechanically. We must bring to the consideration of them a simple, sincere, humble, teachable, and serious mind; must receive them with reverence, gratitude, and affection; and must “mark, learn, and digest them.” We must examine by them, our principles, dispositions, and conduct, and put away whatever is contrary to them. We must comply with, and obey their contents, and seek sincerely and earnestly to possess and practise

the religion they describe. We must, in order to all this, pray to him that gave them, that he may impart to us the Spirit which inspired the authors of them, and by whose influences alone, we can either understand or comply with them. And we must watch and deny ourselves, being really willing to renounce every gratification, custom, or practice, which is discountenanced by the word of God, and to submit to every loss or injury, reproach or suffering, to which we may be exposed in the way of obedience. With respect to others:—The Oracles of God are equally necessary, and designed for all men. They are enjoined to be given, and promised to be made known to all men. (Psal. xxii. 27; Isa. ii. 2; Mic. iv. 1; Isa. xi. 9; lx. 8, 9; Luke xxiv. 47; Mark xvi. 15; Rom. i. 5; Rev. xiv. 6, 7.) All professing Christians are under an obligation to aid the circulation of the Scriptures, and the propagation of divine knowledge, that their endeavours may be consistent with their prayers; for they pray that his “kingdom may come,” and that he would send forth every where his light and truth. The first great command, to “love God with all our heart,” implies that we should be deeply concerned to promote his glory, by causing him and his will to be known through diffusing the knowledge of his Oracles. The second great command, to “love our neighbour as ourselves,” implies the same duty: the doing it is peculiarly pleasing to God, who will not fail to reward it. Thus, and only thus, will the end of Christ’s incarnation, life, and death, be fully answered.

